

Creating Tornadoes: Building the Perfect Monster Storm

By John Amtsfield, February 6, 2008

By now, in these days of long discussions about global warming and the coincidentally abnormally high incidence, frequency and ferocity of tornadoes, hurricanes, tsunamis and other weather phenomena; if there is not agreement on causes, effects and remedies, there is at least agreement that these monster storms are caused by clashes of hot or warm fronts with cold fronts.

Now, we are experiencing these storms even in the winter and the human misery is very, very hard to bear. Our hearts go out to the helpless innocent victims of the savagery of nature and the elements. I am mindful of all of these tragic circumstances and I am really struck by similarities to unfolding events in the Postal world and especially as it applies to rural carriers.

I found myself thinking that for all the anger and the frustration we feel when tornadoes, hurricanes and other monstrous storms strike; our overwhelming feelings are frustration at our helplessness and how powerless we are to find effective remedies, to pin point blame, assign responsibility and seek redress. Oftentimes we take out frustrations out on civil defense responders, insurance companies, local officials and even the national guard when all they are trying to do mostly is help (well everyone except maybe some of the insurance companies).

What if we could see someone or some entity actually creating all of the conditions, actually super-heating the air and coldly chilling the other forces; where we saw them deliberately creating and magnifying a monster storm to create as much havoc as possible, to adversely affect as many people as possible and to literally ruin people. What would be our response if everyone of us saw it, recognized it for what it was and watched in horror as the villains directed the storm right at everyone of us like a targeted smart bomb.

Welcome to the 2008 Mail Count. Make no mistake about it, USPS is invading your space like a horde of Viking barbarians intent on rape, pillage, looting and taking no prisoners. They will lie, they will cheat and they will steal to make sure that you end up with less than you are entitled to. They are making every effort to misinterpret, to miscount and to avoid proper credit for reasonable activities that they expect from you all year long.

They are literally holding per rally sessions to deny you legitimate credit for other suitable allowance, dismount distance, withdrawal time, mark-ups, collection box and NDCBU collection compartment time, safety talks, loading time, DPS errors, customer inquiries, additional safety talks to relief employees, and a host of dozens of other items. They tell their manager/counters that every certified equals an additional salary in the amount of four minutes knowing full well that each certified delivered is four minutes divided by 2 weeks which is 2 minutes that may or may not affect a carrier's salary since each salary level is actually 71 minutes for a K route. In order for a carrier's certified letters to affect their salary they could require up to as much as 34 additional certified letters. By telling manager/counters that each piece needs to be scrutinized and judged for credit, they create a false impression with manager/counters, that each and every piece is open for dispute and that perhaps carriers are not entitled to such credit. I don't know how many hundreds of times I have heard managers coerce carriers or convince carriers to not count unusual numbers of certified s, telephone book parcels, large mailings that arrive during count by simply telling carriers that credit for those items could lead to a route adjustment. (If unusual mail count circumstances caused

a larger than normal route evaluation and USPS proposed to cut, I would contest the adjustment under the comments provisions for route adjustments and follow it up with a grievance if USPS persisted). USPS cannot have it both ways; "Oh sorry the TV Guides and other weekly magazines did not come it for both count weeks, that's just tough luck!"

USPS has been proven to cheat and lie in attempting to illegally impact and hold back count credit. They have been proven to use count guidelines and their count seminars to make sure rural carriers do not get a fair count. At the local, district and national levels, USPS has repeatedly cheated on mail counts.

When USPS was the gang that could not shoot straight, joint mail count seminars were held where management and craft conducted the mail count. Everyone got the exact same information. Now USPS count seminars are secretive and unions bar managers from their count seminars.

When I used to conduct mail count seminars for both managers and craft, I would always close the seminar by mentioning that mail count time was a time of extreme stress for managers and for carriers alike. Everyone was on edge. Carriers livelihood was at stake and at risk and every carriers knew of someone who had at one time taken a major hit during a mail count. Carriers were worried and they are afraid, because their livelihood, their standard of living, their whole financial future was at stake and at risk. Carriers were afraid of the unknown and worried about the worst case scenario. Managers, on the other hand, overworked and understaffed suddenly had to do a whole lot more work including counting mail, route inspections, doing the paperwork and dealing with rural carriers who were frightened and insecure. I pleaded with both carriers and managers, to understand that everyone was under stress and pressure and to try and take that into account and that once everyone got into the count and things were dealt with fairly and openly, things might settle down.

I also made the point to managers, that their budget hours were a fixed budget item and that it was in their best interests as well as the carriers, that the mail count reflect the work carriers did all year. It did not make sense to short a carrier during mail count and then have to expect the same carrier to meet his weekly standard hours if the route was improperly evaluated. In that case, the issues would compound the managers plight with overtime and FLSA 2080 issues.

These days, all of that is out the window, when districts require copies of daily count sheets to monitor and perhaps to red line specific entries. All of the pressure that is being placed on managers creates the implicit suggestion that managers are expected to hold down mail count credits.

Some of what managers are telling carriers in the lead up to mail count and at the pre-count conferences is very disheartening. To see Advos, Valassis or Red Plum go from addressed circulars to box holders on week before mail count nationally, sends a very strong message to every rural carriers that USPS is cheating them again and that the Union is silent and will not do anything.

USPS has a proven track record of serial cheating, lying and stealing from rural carriers. Every mail count, every rural carrier knows that USPS will at some level try to cheat them again, will lie to them and will steal from them. So far, they have yet to be disappointed.

Back to the analogy with tornadoes Using Very COLD and calculating actions, USPS is pumping this

COLD calculating action into a heavily charged super-heated environment with the express purpose of denying proper credit for rural carriers who are hot and getting hotter. The confluence of what USPS is doing with calculation is creating the conditions for a whole phalanx of perfect monster storms all across the country, all at the same time and all without regard for the consequences.

Since this is all deliberate; the consequences are predictable and the fault, blame and responsibility is crystal clear.

I wonder why USPS wants to add new and even more horrific chapters in the saga of "going postal".

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