

**Statement of Henry Dynka
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United States Postal Service
Before the United States House of Representatives
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on the Interior, Energy, and Environment
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Good morning, Chairman Farenthold, Ranking Member Plaskett, and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Henry Dynka and I am the Manager of In-Plant Support for the Postal Service's Northeast Area office. In this role, I oversee the ongoing review and evaluation of service and quality performance at processing and distribution centers across the Northeast Area. I also provide technical support to Post Offices within our service area, which includes the Caribbean District.

As a member of our Northeast Area's Emergency Management Team at the leadership level, I was personally deployed to the Caribbean for approximately seven weeks after the storms.

The unprecedented circumstance of two Category five hurricanes making landfall so close after one another presented challenges that the Postal Service had not experienced during past hurricane recovery efforts. I appreciate the opportunity to provide the Subcommittee information on the preparation, response and recovery efforts the Postal Service employed in the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) as a result of Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

The Postal Service utilizes comprehensive integrated emergency management plans at every level of the organization, which include team concept of operations, evacuation plans, and continuity of operations plan (COOP), to ensure the continuation of essential postal functions and critical services in the event of a natural or man-made disaster. In addition, we have an extensive Hurricane Preparedness Guide used to assist postal managers at the District, Area, and Headquarters levels in providing the necessary direction, coordination and support to ensure facilities are prepared for, and able to respond to and recover from a hurricane.

The Postal Service's primary focus is the safety and well-being of our employees and customers, and the integrity of the nation's mail system. Each decision we made and actions taken before, during, and after the hurricanes that devastated so much of the Caribbean was based on these priorities.

Preparations for Hurricanes Irma and Maria

The Postal Service prepared for the hurricanes well before anticipated landfalls. When it was known that the Caribbean District, which encompasses Puerto Rico and USVI, was in the direct path of Hurricane Irma, and later Hurricane Maria, we began reviewing our District and Area COOP. We also began holding regular telephone conferences to assess the Caribbean District's level of preparedness.

Using the Hurricane Preparedness Guide as a "playbook", Headquarters, Northeast Area, and Caribbean District staff developed a localized plan to prepare for the impending storms. As we monitored the approaching weather systems, we notified potentially affected offices, employees, labor union and management association representatives, the Postal Inspection Service and the Postal Service Office of the Inspector General (OIG) of our plan to secure equipment and facilities, and to safely evacuate and utilize designated COOP locations when the storms hit.

Specifically, potentially impacted mail processing facilities and Post Offices were notified to be prepared for closure. Emergency equipment, such as generators, were assessed for operability; and electronic equipment was powered down, disconnected and moved to higher ground, as was all unprocessed and undelivered mail. Postal vehicles and facilities were secured to the extent possible before the onset of the storms. Alternate employee work sites were identified at available facilities outside of the expected impact zone to ensure some semblance of mail service was restored as soon as possible following the hurricanes.

As part of our COOP, employees were asked to confirm their contact information, including emergency contacts, so we were able to account for their status as soon as possible following the hurricanes. We deployed Meals-Ready-to-Eat (MREs) and water to the USVI prior to Hurricane Irma making landfall. National Employee Emergency Hotline messaging was also shared with employees via various communication platforms. Additional generators, water, MREs, hand sanitizer, and disinfectant wipes were staged at locations on the mainland and shipped to the Caribbean District after the storms made landfall. Caribbean District staff followed the same course of actions in preparation for Hurricane Maria.

Immediate Impacts of Hurricanes Irma and Maria on Postal Service Operations

Hurricane Irma primarily impacted the islands of St. Thomas and St. John. As soon as the hurricane passed, the Postal Service sent additional personnel to the affected areas to quickly provide support to employees who remained on St. Thomas through the duration of the storm. Immediately following the storm, the Postal Inspection Service began assessing the integrity of postal facilities on the island. The Veterans Station, which services approximately 6,000 Post Office Box customers, sustained structural damage. Before the Postal Service could secure this location, we experienced loss of mail due to looting and weather-related damage. To assist in securing postal facilities, additional Postal Inspectors and OIG personnel were deployed to St. Thomas.

Immediately following Hurricane Irma, the federal government assumed control of the airport in St. Thomas and limited transportation to emergency supplies and services only. Since mail (including packages) was not deemed an emergency supply or service, this created a backlog of items destined to St. Thomas and St. John. Transportation that was available was used to send additional supplies, such as bottled water and MREs to St. Thomas for our employees. Once the restrictions on the airport were relaxed, we were able to resume limited mail flights to St. Thomas. However, the regular barge used to transport mail from St. Thomas to St. John remained out of service for approximately two weeks.

On September 16, a week and a half after Hurricane Irma hit, mail was available for pickup at the Charlotte Amalie, East End, and Havensight Post Offices on St. Thomas. We also established partial delivery service throughout the island, wherever it was safe for our employees to travel. It is important to note that while we were establishing limited mail service, we were concurrently preparing for Hurricane Maria, which was expected to make landfall in a few days. By September 19, we were able to transport mail to St. John via boat and made pick up service available to local residents. As a curfew between the hours of 6 p.m. to 10 a.m. had been imposed after Hurricane Irma hit, we remained in close contact with local government officials and established Post Office operating hours of 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. to ensure customer and employee compliance. We utilized all traditional news outlets to communicate Post Office hours. Post Office operations ceased later in the day on September 19 as Hurricane Maria began to make landfall.

While St. Croix sustained minimal damage from Hurricane Irma and we quickly resumed regular mail delivery, the island was so severely impacted by Hurricane Maria that it took approximately one week to gather intelligence and determine necessary recovery actions to facilities. The Frederiksted Post Office, in particular, was severely damaged and experienced a loss of mail due to looting and weather damage. To overcome resulting communications difficulties on St. Croix, we established twice daily touchpoint calls with the Postmaster on the island to obtain personnel status updates.

The Postal Service partnered with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to use its helicopters to transport supplies and critical backlogged mail containing checks and medicine destined to St. Croix. We were only able to begin moving other mail to St. Croix on October 2. It continued to be difficult to transport mail into St. Thomas because flights were limited to daytime hours.

The circumstances of Hurricanes Irma and Maria hitting back-to-back meant we were unable to recover from the first storm before bracing for the second storm to hit. Following the storms, we moved quickly to first locate employees and then to assess the extent of damage to facilities. This included determining which major utilities and resources, such as water, power and fuel, needed to be repaired or replenished. We also assessed the impact to our delivery and mail processing operations.

Executives at the highest level of the organization were engaged with recovery efforts and kept abreast of the situation so that critical decisions could be made and supported quickly. The Postal Service's Chief Operating Officer participated in daily telecons with Northeast Area and Caribbean District personnel to discuss recovery actions and to ensure resources were provided expeditiously.

Over a three-month period the Northeast Area sent a leadership team, including senior level executives, to support recovery efforts. Teams deployed included personnel from Operations, Human Resources, Transportation and Information Technology. Employee Assistance Program (EAP) personnel were also deployed to the areas impacted by the storms.

Recovery Actions Following Hurricanes Irma and Maria

Postal Service recovery activities following the hurricanes focused on people, property, product, and communications.

People

Communication was extremely difficult in the immediate aftermath of both hurricanes. Cellular service was spotty or nonexistent, and due to power outages, many employees were unable to communicate their status. Despite these communication challenges, Caribbean District and Northeast Area personnel held coordinated conference calls three times a day, focusing first on locating employees to ensure all were safe. All USVI employees were accounted for within seven days following Hurricane Irma, and within eight days after Hurricane Maria.

Once the safety of our employees was confirmed, we provided them aid. Nearly 2,000,000 bottles of water and 700,000 MREs were distributed to employees in Puerto Rico and USVI. In addition, a total of 2,800 care packages—consisting of first-aid kits, flashlights, batteries, bug repellent and hand sanitizer—were distributed.

Property

Postal Service facilities and equipment, including generators for back-up power, sustained significant damage. By October 4, all 12 USVI facilities were fully or partially operational, or had established full or partial service at alternate sites. Both the Frederiksted Post Office and the Veterans Station continue to undergo repairs, which are expected to be completed sometime this summer.

Product

Because we were initially unable to transport mail to USVI, due to limited transportation options, it created a backlog. Further, destinating mail volume increased significantly as friends and family on the mainland sent aid to loved ones on the islands via mail.

In order to compensate for the lack of flights going in to St. Thomas, beginning on September 7, mail destined for St. Thomas and St. John was processed to a more finite sort level (5-digit ZIP Code level) on the mainland. When it arrived in the Caribbean, it could then by-pass the processing operations in Puerto Rico and quickly be sent directly to St. Thomas.

On September 15, we dedicated significant resources to reprogramming mail processing equipment in Puerto Rico, to process mail in delivery order, which expedited delivery once this mail reached St. Thomas. This operational adjustment was necessary due to limited employee availability on St. Thomas, caused in part by the ongoing curfew.

Transportation routes were also adjusted so mail could be promptly sent to temporary alternate sites upon arrival on USVI. The Postal Service also operated mobile units and deployed tents to allow customers to receive retail services and retrieve mail while permanent facilities were being assessed for structural damage and undergoing cleaning and repairs.

Additionally, we recruited 25 temporary employees on USVI to assist the 156 permanent employees with sorting mail and resuming timely mail delivery.

Communication

The Postal Service experienced multiple communications challenges, including an inability to transmit scan data on the availability or status of package deliveries. A lack of internet access was the primary contributing factor affecting mail and package tracking since the scan data could not be uploaded and recorded. Further, power outages meant that mobile delivery devices used to scan mail and packages could not be charged. The Postal Service has since invested in satellite dishes to improve communication coverage. They are currently being placed in strategic locations with limited cellular coverage.

To notify customers regarding the status of mail service, we leveraged social media, including a growing group of Facebook sites, including “USVI Hurricanes Maria and Irma Alert” and “Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency.” The Postal Service made regular, reliable official posts to more than 14 local social media venues to share facts and reduce or correct misinformation. We also provided messaging and interviews to national and local news outlets.

To communicate with local employees, we provided nightly emergency hotline information (scripted and verbally delivered by local managers). We also provided information via internal electronic and hardcopy postal communications channels.

On September 22, we began a series of regular email/text updates sent to elected officials providing them status updates on Post Office closures, processing operations, and indicating how employees could contact the Postal Service to report their status.

Coordination with Other Federal Agencies

The Postal Service partnered with several agencies including DEA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Customs and Border and Protection (CBP) and the Department of Defense (DoD), to both ensure the safety of our employees and to reestablish mail delivery.

For example, Postal Service OIG staff sought the assistance of CBP contacts to locate employees on St. John when Hurricane Irma hit. The first postal personnel responding to St. Croix in the aftermath of Maria were able to do so because of transportation provided by DEA.

For the first time, we also partnered with DoD for an initial shipment of mail to the Caribbean District. This helped reduce the amount of backlogged mail.

Additionally, we partnered with agencies on several important mailings. We assisted FEMA with expedited mailing of hardcopy Individual Assistance grant applications to the mainland for processing, and we worked with the Center for Disease Control and USVI Department of Health to distribute public health informational flyers.

Challenges and Lessons Learned from Hurricanes Irma and Maria

The devastation in the USVI from Hurricanes Irma and Maria was unlike any experienced in recent history. The back-to-back Category five hurricanes caused extensive damage to the power and communication infrastructures in USVI, leaving the Postal Service without power and internet service for an extended period of time. This hampered our efforts to restore retail operations and track the delivery of mail and packages. We continue to face some challenges with intermittent interruptions to internet service and power.

The transportation infrastructure was also severely affected. The St. Thomas airport was closed for ten days following Hurricane Maria and then reopened with limited daily flights and operating hours, which remain in effect today. As a result, the latest flights leaving for St. Thomas do not always align with our mail processing operations, which means mail arriving in St. Thomas is not always delivered that same day.

Further, the barge used to transport mail from St. Thomas to St. John was out of service for two weeks, resulting in additional mail delivery delays.

Other infrastructure was significantly harmed, and road closures and debris made it difficult for our employees to travel on the islands. Every postal facility in the USVI was damaged, obstructed, or impacted by loss of power and water. The Frederiksted Post Office on St. Croix was severely damaged. Our efforts to repair and rebuild affected facilities have been extensive and are ongoing. We have worked quickly to restore retail and delivery services in devastated areas, despite stringent curfews on the three islands.

We are currently assessing the overall impact of the storms from a national perspective to determine any opportunities for improvement. The lessons learned from the unique circumstances and challenges we encountered in the USVI include:

- Like many businesses and federal agencies, the Postal Service relies heavily upon technology and internet service for its operations. The lack of internet service impacted our ability to restore services. As such, the Postal Service is strategically installing satellite dishes around the USVI to improve our internet capability now and in the future.
- Consistent with our universal service obligation, the Postal Service accepted all packages bound for the USVI even though the St. Thomas airport was initially closed and later reopened with limited flights and hours. As a result, a significant backlog of mail and packages accumulated on the mainland. More robust communication to our customers can help to better manage delivery expectations and improve the customer experience. We also learned that by reprogramming our processing equipment to presort mail in delivery order, we could eliminate the need for sorting at the local Post Offices and thereby expedite delivery to our customers. In order to handle the backlog of mail, we developed an expedited hiring process allowing the Postal Service to adjust staffing levels much quicker than normal. This process will allow us to be more flexible in the future, should the need arise.
- The limited transportation environment in the Caribbean immediately following the hurricanes reinforced the need to constantly assess transportation options. In the case of the USVI, we contracted with a commercial air carrier and also partnered with DoD for the one-time transportation of mail.
- Finally, we recognized that daily assessment of mail processing operations and the ability to dynamically manage mail as needed was key to handling the significant volumes.

Current State of Postal Service Operations

At this time, all Post Offices in USVI are operational with the exception of the Frederiksted Post Office. Post Office Box mail, package, and retail services are provided at a temporary location while the damaged facility is rebuilt. Delivery services for Frederiksted customers are being provided out of the Kingshill Post Office. The Veterans Station facility is currently providing service out of a mobile unit on-site, with an additional unit being deployed next week to improve customer service. Repairs at the Frederiksted Post Office and Veterans Station are expected to be completed sometime this summer.

Last week, review teams were deployed to every office in USVI to assess staffing needs. The staffing analysis should be completed within approximately 30 days. Staffing adjustments, if any, will be implemented as soon as reasonably possible based on availability of qualified personnel.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Postal Service is grateful for the coordination, partnership and assistance provided by the federal agencies in attendance, as well as those not represented at today's hearing. We are also proud of all postal employees who have worked tirelessly to restore mail service in the Caribbean District following

Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Many of these incredibly resilient and dedicated employees committed to restoring postal services while having to rebuild their own homes following the devastation.

While we recognize that challenges remain, which continue to affect expected service levels, the Postal Service is committed to ensuring we fulfill our mandate to provide secure, efficient, and affordable mail service to all our USVI customers.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to submit this testimony. I welcome any questions that you and the Subcommittee Members may have.

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Henry A. Dynka

Manager, In-Plant Support— Northeast Area

Henry A. Dynka is the In-Plant Support Manager for the U.S. Postal Service's Northeast Area office—a position he has held since September 2017. In this capacity, he oversees the ongoing review and evaluation of service and quality performance at mail processing and distribution centers, and provides technical support to post office operations within across the Northeast Area.

The Northeast Area includes 45 plants, 4,000 delivery and retail units and approximately 90,000 employees over a vast geographic area that includes Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, parts of New York and New Jersey, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.



Henry began his career in 1988 as a part-time flexible mail handler in the Syracuse (NY) Processing and Distribution Center and has served in several management positions, including Distribution Operations Manager, Transportation and Networks Manager, Postmaster, Networks Specialist, Maintenance Operations Supervisor and In-Plant Support Manager in the Albany District.

He also served in numerous detail assignments in support of postal operations and most recently spent seven weeks in the Caribbean District on assignments directly related to recovery efforts after Hurricanes Irma and Maria (fall/winter 2017).

Henry is a United States Marine Corp veteran (1984-1988). Military awards include honor graduate Cryogenic Theory and Operations and Non-Commissioned Officer School of Leadership honor graduate.

Henry is Green Belt certified and a 2017 graduate of the Postal Service's prestigious Advanced Leadership Program.