UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE®

Small Plant Best Practices Guidelines

Handbook PO-420 November 1999

A. Explanation. This handbook provides operating guidelines and best practices that can help ensure successful operations at the small plant level. For purposes of this handbook, a "small plant" is defined as one that averages fewer than 250,000 daily cancellations.

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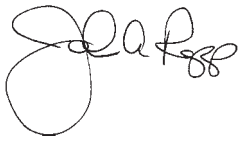

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1 General Information

1-1 Introduction

Strategic planning, ongoing direction, communication, and coordination are very important to the operation of a successful small plant. It is imperative that management at all levels accept and understand the importance of proper staffing and the continued wise utilization of resources, especially the flexible workforce, as new technological advances change the way the Postal Service conducts business. The External First-Class Measurement System (EXFC) testing area has been expanded to include new 3-digit service areas to provide a more accurate look at nationwide service. This expansion has added many small plants that previously were not measured on EXFC. As a result of this expansion, plants are now expected to improve and maintain consistently high service levels to meet Voice of the Customer (VOC) goals.

1-2 Background

The following criteria from fiscal year (FY) 1998 were used to determine which plants were the most successful:

a. Daily productivity indicator (DPI) of 900 or more.

b. Average Daily Delayed Volume of 4,000 or less.

c. EXFC/ODIS (Origin Destination Information System) of 93% or more.

d. Overtime usage of 9% or less.

e. Sick leave of 4% or less.

1-3 Content

This handbook provides operating guidelines and best practices that can help ensure successful operations at the small plant level. For purposes of this handbook, a “small plant” is defined as one that averages fewer than 250,000 daily cancellations.

1-4 Purpose

The major objective of this handbook is to share best practices of successful small plants that, when implemented, will result in a significant improvement in the overall performance of processing operations. This handbook is designed as a reference for plant managers and managers of Distribution Operations (MDOs). Productivity increases resulting from the efficient use of resources are instrumental in controlling costs and positively impacting the Voice of the Business (VOB). It is imperative that management keep abreast of long-term planning objectives and the impact they will have on work hours, productivities, and, ultimately, the salaries and benefits portion of expenses.

2 Supervisor Responsibilities and Duties

2-1 Supervisor Responsibilities

In a small plant a supervisor may be responsible for multiple operations that may cross different tours and crafts. In the most successful small plants, the plant managers and the MDOs assume an active roll in the day-to-day management of floor operations.

2-2 Supervisor Duties

Supervisors assigned to the plant may be responsible for the following:

a. Conducting a safety and operational walk-through at the beginning of the tour with the preceding tour supervisor and addressing any problem areas or deficiencies.

b. Checking mail inventories and daily projections to ensure adequate staffing.

c. Ensuring that the flexible workforce (i.e., part-time flexible employees (PTFs) and casuals) are scheduled according to operational needs.

d. Ensuring that all employees are assigned to the proper operation.

e. Assigning breaks and lunch relief as needed.

f. Ensuring that all equipment is properly staffed and properly programmed and that mail is available throughout the tour.

g. Checking all mail entering and leaving operations to ensure that mail is worked in the right place at the right time.

h. Ensuring that mail that belongs in a downstream operation is moved to those operations in a timely manner.

i. Ensuring that only true manual mail and nixie mail is in the manual operation and that automation-candidate mail is returned to automation for processing.

j. Ensuring that jogging correctly edges all mail in automation.

k. Communicating with the remote encoding center (REC) to monitor turnaround time and leakage.

l. Notifying maintenance if equipment goes down.

m. Making hourly volume counts and adjust staffing accordingly.

n. Performing daily random case or bin checks to verify quality of sort.

o. Ensuring that throughput and acceptance goals and productivity goals are being met.

p. Dispatching all available mail on the earliest available transportation every day.

q. Ensuring that mail transport equipment (MTE) is worked as it is generated and not allowed to accumulate.

r. Updating goals daily and communicating them to employees.

s. Ensuring that employees are working safely and that weekly safety talks are given.

t. Ensuring that all Standard Mail receives a placard denoting date, time, contents, source, and color code and ensuring that the mail is worked in the proper sequence.

u. Ensuring that employees receive adequate training to perform their jobs.

v. Recognizing performance — both good and bad.

w. Completing and submitting all required paperwork in a timely manner.

x. Checking all equipment and cases at the end of the tour to ensure that no mail is left in/on machines or cases and that all mail is dispatched. If mail misses a dispatch, the supervisor must make every effort to get it to its proper destination.

y. Following the operating plan and ensuring that all mail is properly dispatched from the operations at the scheduled time.

3 Employee Staffing

3-1 Staffing

Staffing should be predicated on the following:

a. Equipment inventory.

b. Equipment capability.

c. Equipment availability.

d. Mail volume.

e. Mail arrival.

f. Mail flows.

g. Operational windows.

h. Dispatch and transportation schedules.

Plants should be managed according to budget allocations. When staffing, it is best to staff only for what is needed. The efficient scheduling of PTFs and casuals allows for flexibility in staffing and reduced labor costs. PTFs and casuals should be scheduled during hours of peak processing, and their hours should be monitored and reduced during slow periods *in accordance with the appropriate provisions of the collective bargaining agreements*. The efficient use of these resources will allow the plant to save budget hours and control overtime.

3-2 Daily Work Assignments

Daily work assignments can be time consuming if efficient methods are not utilized to ensure that employees are ready and able to begin work after they have clocked in. If not done properly, the job assignment process can cause confusion and chaos in the operations, resulting in a loss of productivity. Supervisors should perform the following tasks to ensure that daily job assignments are made efficiently:

a. Ensure that all employees are fully trained in their assigned operations.

b. Determine in advance the type of mail to be processed, and have sufficient quantities available at start-up. Prioritize and control the processing order of mail bases available.

c. Coordinate mailflow activities with other work units.

d. Ensure a safe working environment.

e. Monitor equipment and crew performance, and make appropriate adjustments during the operation.

3-3 Employee Responsibilities

All employees have the following responsibilities:

a. Reporting for duty as scheduled.

b. Clocking in and reporting immediately for work.

c. Clocking in on the correct operation number.

d. Adhering to their scheduled breaks and lunch time.

e. Following all directions of supervisors, and processing mail as efficiently as possible.

f. Working in a safe manner, and reporting all unsafe acts and conditions to their supervisor.

g. Following all rules and regulations of the operation and equipment to which they are assigned.

3-4 Performance and Budget

All plants should consider developing operational benchmarks to be used as guides for staffing operations. By observing work procedures based on moderate pace and continuous work over a period of time, it is possible to develop normal benchmarks or productivities that can be used to plan ahead and make staffing decisions. However, such benchmarks or productivities should not be used as the basis for changing current work standards or instituting new work measurement systems or work or time standards. Mail processing supervisors should be responsible for preparing these benchmarks for their respective operations.

One way to develop benchmarks or productivities is to complete an analysis of performance to ensure proper staffing. This should be accomplished over a period of several days in order to obtain representative data.

Supervisors should consider making evaluations during 2-hour windows as organized in the following table, which is for an 030 operation:

Time (2-hr. Period)	Volume Processed	Work Hours	Production (Vol. / Wkhrs.)
Begin Tour – Break (1630 – 1830)	4,500 pcs. (9 trays)	6	750 pph (1.5 trays)
Break – Lunch (1845 – 2030)	3,900 pcs. (7.8 trays)	5.25	743 pph (1.5 trays)
Lunch – Break (2100 – 2300)	4,400 pcs. (8.8 trays)	8	550 pph (1.1 trays)
Break – End Tour (2315 – 0100)	7,250 pcs. (14.5 trays)	8.75	829 pph (1.7 trays)
Overtime (0100 – 0300)	2,800 pcs. (5.6 trays)	4	700 pph (1.4 trays)
TOTALS	**22,850 pcs. (45.7 trays)**	**32**	**714 pph (1.4 trays)**

For volume measures, use typical container types, such as trays for manual distribution, pallets for opening units, pieces for priority, etc.

Using benchmarks or productivities can lead to increased supervisor awareness about problem areas, staffing needs, mail volume, etc., and can help supervisors make decisions based on this information. It will lead to productivity improvements and encourage supervisors to plan ahead based on historical data.

4 Safety

4-1 Personal Safety

Personnel are the most valuable asset of the Postal Service; therefore, employees must be trained to perform their jobs in a manner that ensures personal safety. Safety is the responsibility of every employee.

4-2 Plant Safety

Management is responsible for providing a safe working environment for all employees and for correcting all unsafe conditions promptly. Safety training should address maintaining all equipment in safe operating condition at all times. A current job safety analysis (JSA) for all positions should be available and reviewed by all employees.

The Postal Employees' Safety Enhancement Act (PESEA) changes the status of the Postal Service as an employer under the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act of 1970. Previously, as a federal agency, the Postal Service was exempt from the private-sector provisions of the OSH Act. When PESEA became effective, the Postal Service, like any other nonfederal- or nonstate-government employer in the United States, became fully subject to the OSH Act. This means that the Occupational Safety and Health Agency (OSHA) has jurisdiction over the Postal Service in matters relating to safety and health. The Postal Service may be cited, fined, and referred for criminal prosecution by OSHA.

As an employer under the OSH Act, the Postal Service, through its managers and supervisors, must ensure compliance with all provisions of the Act. Ensuring compliance with existing policies on safety and health will, in large measure, also ensure compliance with federal safety and health regulations. Nevertheless, managers and support staff need to be conversant with OSHA regulations and procedures for compliance, including dealing with investigations, inspections, and resultant citations and penalties. Handbook EL-802, *Executives' and Managers' Safety Compliance Guide,* is an excellent reference to assist you in developing a safety and health program that is second to none.

4-3 Accident Prevention

The operation and maintenance of modern machinery involves a team effort between Maintenance and Operations. All equipment embodies many safety features that are constantly being improved through engineering changes and modifications. Improving safeguards for all of our equipment is an ongoing program.

4-4 Responsibilities

4-4.1 General

All employees working in the plant have specific safety responsibilities, as outlined below.

4-4.2 Supervisor Responsibilities

Supervisors have the following responsibilities:

a. Ensuring the safety of all personnel involved in the operation or maintenance of all equipment and systems in their areas of responsibility.

b. Ensuring compliance with all safety rules and regulations and insisting that personnel follow safe operating practices and procedures.

c. Correcting unsafe conditions promptly.

d. Ensuring that all equipment in their area of responsibility is in a safe operational condition at all times.

e. Ensuring that employees receive proper training before engaging in activities.

4-4.3 Maintenance Responsibilities

Maintenance personnel have the following responsibilities:

a. Ensuring that all maintenance is performed in a manner that does not endanger themselves or others.

b. Using all designated safety devices.

c. Following all safety precautions.

d. Maintaining equipment guards and protective devices.

4-4.4 Employee Responsibilities

Employees have the following responsibilities:

a. Adhering to the prescribed operating instructions and rules applicable to the task being performed.

b. Practicing good housekeeping.

c. Reporting all unsafe or hazardous conditions to their supervisor immediately.

d. Operating equipment properly and responsibly to ensure optimum operating proficiency.

4-5 Electrical Fires

In the event of an electrical fire on any equipment, use a Type C, BC, or ABC extinguisher only. Do not use water, soda-acid, or any other liquid stream extinguisher: they present a shock hazard to the user and will cause considerable damage to the electrical equipment.

4-6 Operational Safety Tips

Listed below is a summary of operational safety tips that should be followed by all personnel:

a. When operating or performing maintenance on equipment, do not wear loose-fitting clothing, jewelry, ties, or other articles that could become caught in the machinery.

b. Keep hair away from equipment to avoid entangling it in the machine.

c. Keep fingers, hands, and arms clear of feed belts, screws, chains, gears, and pulleys.

d. Never place your hand on any moving part while the equipment is in operation.

e. Stop equipment before opening any door or panel on the machine.

f. Do not place food or drinks on any part of machinery or equipment, even if it is not in operation.

g. Keep mentally and physically alert.

h. Do not engage in horseplay.

i. Practice good housekeeping.

j. Always follow all safety rules and regulations.

k. Do not attempt to operate equipment on which you have not been properly trained.

5 Managing Plant Operations

5-1 Operating Plan

5-1.1 Purpose

The operating plan provides an approach for planning mail-processing operations to meet service commitments. It provides a method of examining the interrelationship of each operation. A facility uses its operating plan to efficiently process and move mail from one operation to the next. It takes into consideration the equipment being utilized and its processing capabilities. In-Plant Support is responsible for maintaining the operating plan. Every MDO and supervisor of Distribution Operations (SDO) should be familiar with their facility's operating plan.

An operating plan includes the following items for each operation:

a. **Current mail arrival profile** is determined by the time the mail is received. It is important because it is used to determine operational start-ups and staffing levels.

b. **Average daily volumes** are determined by a collection of data over a minimum of a 30-day period. This is important to establish staffing, processing time, dispatch time, and transportation.

c. **Planned start time** is the time an operation should normally begin, based on inventory and mail arrival profile data.

d. **Critical entry time (CET)** is the latest time committed mail can be received in an operation and still be processed before clearance time. CET impacts staffing, sort programs, EXFC, and mailflows.

   (1) Review dock/incoming operations.

   (2) Review opening units.

   (3) Review CET for downstream operations.

e. **Clearance time (CT)** is the latest time committed mail can clear an operation for proper dispatch or delivery.

   (1) Review existing dispatch schedules.

   (2) Review CT for downstream/subsequent operations.

5-1.2 Operating Plan Review

Processing and distribution centers (P&DCs) review all standard operating plans submitted by their processing and distribution facilities (P&DFs) for completeness and compatibility with the long-range mail processing and delivery needs of the P&DC's area of responsibility. The P&DC submits appropriate plans in a complete package to the area office. Area distribution centers (ADCs) and automated area distribution centers (AADCs) for all classes of mail are proposed by the vice president of Area Operations for approval by the vice president of Operations Support at Headquarters.

Generally, P&DC/Fs are selected to function as ADCs or AADCs. They must have sufficient workspace and automated and mechanized processing capability to handle the managed mail processing volume destinating in their area. Separations of mail by specific ZIP Code areas for these ADCs/AADCs are mandatory at each originating processing facility. Incoming and outgoing mail distribution is performed following area guidelines and must be completed by the cutoff times listed in the operating plan for each processing facility. ADCs and AADCs are ultimately determined by the vice president of Field Operations Support at Headquarters.

Area distribution networks have a major role in determining the ZIP Code range for each ADC and AADC. These ZIP Codes are based on optimum transportation capabilities and established service commitments. The area Operations Support manager should submit recommendations to the vice president of Field Operations Support at Headquarters.

5-1.3 Operating Plan Checklist

Use the following checklist when updating the operating plan:

a. Service standards:
   (1) Is the overnight service area defined by ZIP Codes (originating and destinating)?
   (2) Is the service standard defined for all classes of mail (originating and destinating)?

b. Capacity to process:
   (1) Are the average daily volumes for outgoing and incoming operations accurate? (Use peak days of the week.)
   (2) Are the mail arrival profiles accurate?
   (3) Does existing equipment have sufficient capacity to process these volumes? (Check against pieces processed per hour on the advanced facer canceler system (AFCS), multiline optical character reader (MLOCR), mail processing bar code sorter (MPBCS), etc.)
   (4) If volumes are beyond processing capacity in automation/mechanization, are there efforts to move volumes down the ladder to operations currently underutilized? (If this happens with any regularity, then higher management must be informed.)

(5) Is mail processing equipment utilized efficiently to process all the mail within the operation's window?

(6) Is staffing adequate but not greater than required to handle manual volumes?

(7) Was the planned start time calculated when sufficient volumes are available for processing at each operation?

(8) Are operations begun on time (planned start)?

(9) Are the mail prep operations timed to generate the necessary volumes for the planned start of all operations? Are those volumes staged in the operation prior to the planned start?

(10) Are scheme assignments minimized except where staffing with level 5 and level 6 clerks is required (associate offices/stations)?

c. Mail flow:

(1) Is there a team effort to finalize each operation at the approved CT (clearance time) for that operation?

(2) Is there an effort to send all mail to downstream operations and to meet the approved critical entry time (CET) in those operations? Are advance volumes continuously sent downstream to outbound dock operations? Are timely sweeps performed in all operations generating volume to support the Dispatch Plan?

(3) Before an operation runs out of mail, is an attempt made to locate mail in upstream operations? Are upstream operations checked prior to finalizing an operation?

(4) Do any of the plan's downstream flows (operations) overlap CETs with another operation's CT (plan to fail)?

(5) Is the time it takes to move mail between operations considered when developing operational targets (e.g., inbound dock to first operation, movement between floors)?

(6) Are bullpen operations (container consolidation) taken into account when deciding the final CT for dock operations? Are bullpens part of the operating plan?

(7) Is worked mail staged for any length of time in operations, prior to sending it downstream to banding, scanning, and bullpen operations? Is it held because replacement equipment is hard to find?

(8) Are supervisors aware of the CETs and CTs for all operations? Are target times posted? Are they realistic?

(9) What is the procedure for any operation when an operating plan failure occurs? What steps are taken to prevent recurrence?

(10) Is the flow of mail fluid through all operations, with the collective goal of meeting the final clearance time?

(11) When updating operating plans, is the impact on upstream and downstream operations considered, and are appropriate changes made if necessary?

(12) Are efforts made to process all mail in automation and/or mechanization and move mail out of the manual mail stream?

d. Transportation:

(1) Is transportation adequate to support advanced volume to coincide with the planned start time of an operation at the destination plant?

(2) Is transportation in place to support the incoming CETs and outbound CTs for all categories of mail?

(3) Is extra transportation used to support volumes that were not available for the scheduled transportation? Is extra transportation consistently used to support plan failure mail?

(4) Is capacity adequate to handle the CET and CT volumes on transportation?

(5) Are there procedures for identifying mail that arrives on transportation after the CET for any class of mail (delayed volume)?

(6) Is transportation reviewed regularly to support operational changes?

e. Mail transport equipment (MTE):

(1) Is there sufficient MTE in the operations prior to planned start?

(2) Does the lack of MTE affect an area's ability to move mail between operations? What effect does this have on dispatching advanced volumes to the outbound dock? Are volumes collected and moved only when the MTE used becomes full?

(3) Is all MTE containing mail identified with a placard? At the outbound dock, is the MTE staged and organized according to planned dispatches?

(4) Are there procedures for repairing damaged MTE? Is damaged MTE that cannot be repaired locally sent promptly to the mail transport equipment service center (MTESC)?

5-2 Standard Operating Procedure

A standard operating procedure (SOP) is an organized and detailed account of processing activities performed within an operation. (See Appendix A for a model SOP.) SOP development and updating should be a joint effort between Plant Operations and In-Plant Support.

An SOP should have a standardized format and should contain information that is tour specific. Each tour should know the following:

a. Which mail types it is responsible for processing and finalizing.

b. Where its mail comes from.

c. The expected arrival time of the mail.

d. The average daily volume.

e. The planned start of operation.

f. Available sort plans.

An SOP should contain contingency plans for the following:

a. When a machine goes down (i.e., how long to wait before reassigning the crew).

b. When different types of mail need to be processed.

An SOP should contain operational set-up diagrams:

a. What equipment is needed.

b. Where it should be placed.

c. What time it needs to be set up.

d. Who is responsible for setting it up.

Supervisors should review the SOP with every employee in their operation to ensure clarity and understanding. This will give the employees information needed to carry out their duties and responsibilities.

5-3 Processing Strategies

5-3.1 AFCS/ISS Image Lift Strategies

When determining advanced facer canceler system/input subsystem (AFCS/ISS) image lift strategies, a *script only* strategy is appropriate in most cases and conditions. System (P&DC and REC) processing costs as a whole are clearly increased using a *script and enriched* image lift configuration. However, these two AFCS/ISS processing options should be utilized as processing tools, similar to other technological options available to mail processing managers.

When determining lift strategies, consider the day of the week, time of day, on-hand volumes, clearance times, and automated equipment utilization, to name a few. For example, it would not seem appropriate to lift the enriched portion while MLOCR equipment sits idle. Conversely, situations that could dictate a change include MLOCR/ISS breakdowns and unusually heavy meter volumes. In situations such as these, using a *script and enriched* image lift configuration to *avoid plan failures* would be acceptable.

Prior to effecting any operational deviations to these two image lift strategies, carefully consider the following issues:

a. MLOCR/ISS capacity.

b. Output subsystem (OSS) capacity.

c. Remote computer reader (RCR) throughput capacity.

d. Decision storage unit (DSU) limitations.

e. Volume arrival times.

f. Late arriving managed mail (LAMM) on-hand volumes.

g. Clearance times (CTs).

h. Originating cycle times.

i. Operating windows.

j. Capacity to process.

k. REC staffing levels.

l. Image turnaround time.

Managers must make certain that the perceived service benefits achieved by lifting the *enriched portion* of AFCS/ISS outweigh the clearly defined increased costs and that these service benefits can be realistically achieved and documented. Further, compelling evidence exists regarding the beneficial error rates that MLOCR processing provides when compared to the error rates associated with RCR processing. As technology enhancements mature, the above-mentioned image lift options and subsequent mailflow strategies might require further review, and plants should be aware that further changes could be forthcoming.

5-3.2 Automation

Automated distribution of letter mail is the optimal distribution method and is preferred over both manual and mechanized methods. Automation processing provides the finest depth of sort, at the lowest possible cost, using the available automated equipment (e.g., MLOCR, MPBCS, delivery barcode sorter (DBCS), carrier sequence barcode sorter (CSBCS), etc.). Letters are processed and sorted on the MLOCRs by scanning the address on the letter, applying a base depth of sort barcode, and directing it to its proper destinating stacker. Letters processed by MPBCSs, DBCSs, and CSBCSs are sorted by reading the barcode printed on the envelope and directing it to its proper stacker. The remote barcoding system (RBCS) handles letters that could not be read by the MLOCR. Images of this nonreadable mail are electronically sent to a remote keying site where employees key in the proper information to enable a modified barcode sorter or output subsystems (OSS) to apply the barcode that represents the best depth of sort for the address provided.

The following are letter mail costs per 1,000 pieces (computed as of AP 13 FY 99):

- Automation with RBCS: $5.39
- Mechanized: $28.07
- Manual: $58.84

The cost per 1,000-piece handlings in mail processing direct distribution operations is monitored to identify areas of opportunity. Cost comparisons are useful to emphasize both to our customers and ourselves the magnitude of the expense in different distribution methods and the need to move processing toward the most efficient methods.

The primary operating program for improving distribution efficiency is the automation program. The automation program is focused on three strategies:

a. Generating barcoded mail.

b. Processing barcoded mail in automated operations.

c. Adjusting the workforce to reduce or avoid work hours.

5-4 Remote Barcoding System (RBCS)

RBCS has grown to encompass many equipment subsystems. The AFCS/ISS rapidly culls, positions (faces), cancels, prints an ID tag, sorts mail pieces, and transfers the images of mail pieces lacking machine-typed addresses to the image processing subsystem (IPSS) directly. However, the AFCS/ISS does not replace the multiline optical character reader/input subsystem (MLOCR/ISS).

Mail pieces that are determined to be OCR-readable are processed using the MLOCR/ISS. The images processed through the MLOCR/ISS may or may not actually be OCR-readable. The MLOCR/ISS will do one of two things: spray a barcode and sort it, or transfer the image to an IPSS for further processing.

For tracking purposes, every letter receives an ID tag. A copy of the ID tag travels with the letter image. The ISS also stores images for the IPSS/P&DC when it comes on line. Images should be stored on the ISS before the IPSS/P&DC is connected to the ISS.

IPSS includes subsystem equipment located at the P&DC (ISS/P&DC) and the remote encoding center (ISS/REC). ISS reject images are transferred between these two. The remote computer reader (RCR) enables the final processing of some images, thereby eliminating the need for image transfer to the IPSS/REC. RCR is an enhancement to the IPSS, giving it an additional capability to completely resolve some handwritten or machine-printed images that the ISS was unable to barcode. This image, if resolved, does not go to the REC. Instead, a new, faster “accelerator” has been added to allow the handwritten address interpretation (HWAI) software time to resolve neatly written cursive and handwritten mailpieces. Besides storing images, the IPSS/P&DC stores the barcode results that return from the keyers at the IPSS/REC.

The IPSS/REC processes the images not resolved by the RCR. Images are displayed on a video display terminal (VDT). A data conversion operator (DCO) views the image and keys in the information needed to determine the barcode. The barcode result returns to the IPSS/P&DC.

The mail processing barcode sorter/output subsystem (MPBCS/OSS) and delivery barcode sorter/output subsystem (DBCS/OSS) equipment is designed to read the ID tag of each mailpiece and use this information to request barcode results returned from the IPSS/REC. These results are properly matched with the mailpieces so that the correct barcode is sprayed and the mailpiece is sorted.

All of the subsystems named here make up the RBCS system. This may further expand as automation evolves within the Postal Service.

6 Recognizing Performance

6-1 Recognizing Exceptional Performance

All successful plants have programs to recognize exceptional performance. Employees should receive regular performance feedback, including praise when deserved. A small thing like a “thank you” or a “great job” go a long way in creating job satisfaction and improving overall performance. Monetary awards (consistent with the *Employee Labor and Relations Manual* (ELM) Section 470), jackets, t-shirts, pizzas, doughnuts, movie tickets, etc., are additional ways to recognize exceptional performance.

6-2 Attendance Control

6-2.1 General

Annual leave is provided to employees for rest and recreation and for personal and emergency purposes. Sick leave insures employees against loss of pay if they are incapacitated for the performance of duties because of illness, injury, pregnancy and confinement, and medical (including dental or optical) examination or treatment.

6-2.2 Administration Policy

Postal Service policy is to administer the leave program on an equitable basis for all employees, considering the following:

a. The needs of the Postal Service.

b. The welfare of the individual employee.

6-2.3 Employee Responsibility

ELM 511.43 states, “Employees are expected to maintain their assigned schedule and must make every effort to avoid unscheduled absences. In addition, employees must provide acceptable evidence for absences when required.”

6-2.4 Supervisor Responsibility

It is the supervisor's responsibility to control unscheduled absences — i.e., any absences from work that are not requested and approved in advance. To control unscheduled absences, supervisors must perform the following:

a. Inform employees of leave regulations.

b. Discuss attendance records with individual employees when warranted.

c. Maintain and review PS Form 3972, *Absence Analysis,* and PS Form 3971, *Request for or Notification of Absence*.

Appendix B contains examples of forms that can be used in monitoring leave.

7 In-Plant Support

In a small plant, In-Plant Support personnel may have all or some of the following responsibilities:

a. Maintaining accurate sort programs and updating them as needed.

b. Making all sort programs available to Operations personnel.

c. Communicating all sort program changes.

d. Maintaining and updating the plant operating plan.

e. Maintaining updated label files.

f. Assisting Operations in maintaining and updating all signage.

g. Providing data to support operational goals and performance.

h. Posting goals and actual performance levels.

i. Reviewing daily Management Operating Data System (MODS) reports and notifying operations of any discrepancies.

j. Performing density analysis.

k. Charting machine utilization.

l. Determining automation opportunities based on current volumes and machine utilization.

m. Supplying REC with image projections.

n. Managing and controlling the training program.

o. Recording and/or reporting volumes for the daily mail condition report (MCR).

p. Preparing requirements calls, decision analysis reports (DARs), and justification of expenditures (JOEs).

q. Completing site surveys and site preparation for new equipment.

r. Implementing the Automation Proficiency Improvement (API) program.

s. Determining staffing needs and preparing short-term and long-term complement planning strategies.

t. Planning for automation impact on complement with the deployment of the flat sorting machine optical character reader (FSMOCR) — i.e., reducing staffing and replacing level 5 clerks with level 4 clerks.

u. Reviewing daily ODIS, EXFC, and Priority End To End (PETE) scores and providing operations with daily performance.

v. Managing the local quality improvement program.

w. Monitoring mail hygiene and readability and recommending improvements as necessary.

x. Managing transportation and networks and recommending changes as service dictates.

8 Maintenance Strategies

8-1 Machine Maintenance

Machine utilization efficiency requires that equipment be kept in optimum operating condition. Therefore, scheduled maintenance windows must be observed, and preventive and predictive maintenance strategies must be included in standard procedures. Operations supervisors must learn to recognize symptoms of poor machine performance and report these symptoms promptly to maintenance personnel.

Maintenance and operations supervisors should cultivate a cooperative working relationship. The technical expertise of maintenance personnel should be used as a resource to attain maximum equipment effectiveness.

8-2 Maintenance Windows

Machines do not operate proficiently when the required maintenance has not been performed. The following guidelines can help ensure good maintenance:

a. Establish maintenance windows and enforce them.

b. Schedule maintenance windows at times of low volume and low utilization.

c. Have someone other than the person performing routes answer maintenance calls, which take away from the routes being performed.

8-3 Preventive Maintenance

Include time for cleaning and any planned corrective maintenance and maintenance work orders.

See Maintenance Management Orders for route requirements and checklists:

a. Daily route performance.

b. Weekly route performance.

c. Monthly route performance.

d. Quarterly route performance.

8-4 Maintenance Assistance to Operations

Maintenance personnel should provide the following assistance to Operations personnel:

a. Analyze jam rates.

b. Analyze locations of jams, looking for areas of repetitive jams.

c. Analyze mechanical reject rates.

d. Analyze rejects.

e. Monitor I.D. tag quality.

f. Document problems in the maintenance log.

g. Communicate with the operators and supervisors — success is a joint effort.

9 Success Strategies

Successful small plants have the following characteristics:

a. They maintain good working relationship with their senior plant and are given the support and tools they need to be successful.

b. They are managed according to budget allocations.

c. Management and unions work together toward common goals. Communication and trust are evident.

d. Managers and supervisors are trained in the administration of the National Agreement and make efforts not to violate it.

e. Goals are clearly communicated. Supervisors and employees receive daily updates about goals.

f. Supervisors are given the training required to be successful and are held accountable.

g. Supervisors are not afraid to take risks or take the extra effort necessary to attain goals and provide superior service.

h. All mail is properly color coded and staged and worked in proper sequence.

i. They maintain excellent signage for staging and dispatch areas.

j. They have clean, organized workspaces.

k. Mail processing and maintenance employees work together as a team.

l. Maintenance personnel stay on the workroom floor in close proximity to the equipment and monitor its operation.

m. They have an excellent rapport with their REC.

n. Their accurate image projections and frequent communication result in quick turn-around times and low idle time.

o. They emphasize keeping leakage rates low.

p. They strive to keep mail in automation and eliminate manual volumes.

q. They monitor and control sick leave.

r. They recognize and reward exceptional performance.

s. They manage a flexible workforce properly and schedule it according to operational needs *within the provisions of the collective bargaining agreements.*

t. Their In-Plant Support personnel are knowledgeable and competent, and they maintain excellent working relationships with Maintenance and Processing personnel.

Appendix A

SOP Model

A-1 Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) — Sample Narrative Format

In addition to the SOP requirements outlined on the first page of the SOP model, you also must address the following items in a brief narrative on a separate page.

a. State whether the operation is a continuation from a previous tour or begins and ends within the same tour.

b. Under Critical Entry and Clearance Times, include Input and Output Process indicators to compare the actual normal conditions during these time periods against the objectives of the overall operations.

c. Document proper and safe work methods for performing all the tasks within the operations. Develop a methods guide or a user's manual that is easily accessible to anyone supervising the operation.

d. Add a separate attachment to identify the internal customers of this particular operation. Address the requirements expected by these customers and the benefits they derive from an effective and complete operation. This list should include indicators used to assess performance against the internal customer requirements (for example, "customers require 24-hour response time") to measure how well the customer's requirement are met.

A-2 Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) — Sample Model

Note: The following text replicates the information requested on the following form, but it is presented here without the design of the form. A completed form is provided as an example, and it is followed by the sample model.

1. **General Information**
   a. SOP Control Number:
   b. Date:
   c. Office:
   d. Important Phone Numbers:
2. **Operation Information**
   a. Operation Name:
   b. Operation Location:
   c. Operation Number(s):
   d. Operation Description:
   e. Operation Objective:
3. **Hours**
   a. Critical Entry Time (CET):
   b. Clearance Time (CT):
   c. Hours of Operation (See Operating Plan):
   d. Peak Hours:
4. **Volume and Productivity**
   a. Average Daily Volume:
   b. Productivity Targets:
5. **Flow of Mail**
   a. Sources of Mail (Operations & Locations):
   b. Downflow/Destination of Mail:
6. **Equipment**
   a. Initial Support Equipment:
   b. Number & Type of Machines Used Daily (Weekday/Weekend):
7. **Processing Tools**
   a. Auto/Mech/Manual-Sort Plans/Case Diagrams:
8. **Routine Operation**
   a. Begin Tour Routine:
   b. Site Specific Information:
   c. Safety:
   d. Scheduling of Breaks & Lunches:
   e. Staffing:
   f. End Tour Routine:
9. **Unit(s) of Count**
10. **Contingency Plan**

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES (SOPS) — EXAMPLE	
1. GENERAL INFORMATION	
SOP Control Number	100.
Date	22-Oct-95.
Office	Anywhere P&DC.
Important Phone Numbers	MDO Office 703-345-6789. In-Plant Support 703-345-6780. Safety 703-345-6781. Labor Relations 703-345-6782.
2. OPERATION INFORMATION	
Operation Name	First Class Opening Unit.
Operation Location	East end of main building between columns A-2 and H-24. Operation is located adjacent to MLOCR, BCS & MPLSM machines and easily identified by large purple conveyor system.
Operation Number(s)	010, 011, 015, 020, 110. Include MODS # descriptor.
Operation Description	1 Dual Pass Rough Cull System, 1 Loose Mail System (purple monster), 4 Advanced Facer Cancelers, 1 Mark II Facer Canceler, 2 Flyers and 1 Flats Canceler.
Operation Objective	To cull, face, cancel and prepare raw collection and meter mail for processing in downstream operations by prescribed operation completion time.
3. HOURS	
Critical Entry Time (CET)	2000 hours.
Clearance Time (CT)	2125 hours.
Hours of Operation (See Operating Plan)	1300–2230 hours.
Peak Hours	1900–2100 hours.
4. VOLUME AND PRODUCTIVITY	
Average Daily Volume	600k/weekday and 300k/Saturday.
Productivity Targets	?k/hour on AFCS, ?k/hour on Flats Canceler and ?k/hour on Mark II.

5. FLOW OF MAIL	
Sources of Mail (Operations & Locations)	Inbound collection platform outside doors on east side of 010 operation. Mail transported to unit by platform mailhandlers. Use proper placarding/labeling.
Downflow/Destination of Mail	Destination of mail after processed in current operation. List sort programs that apply in current and subsequent operations.
6. EQUIPMENT	
Initial Support Equipment	10 gurneys, 5 GPMCs, 3 large hampers.
Number & Type of Machines Used Daily (Weekday/Weekend)	4 AFCSs, 2 Mark IIs, 2 Flyers, 1 Flats Canceler on weekdays. 4 AFCSs, 1 Mark II, 1 Flyer, 1 Flats Canceler on Saturdays.
7. PROCESSING TOOLS	
Auto/Mech/Manual-Sort Plans/Case Diagrams	See attached floor layout.
8. ROUTINE OPERATION	
Begin Tour Routine	Interface with previous tour supervisor to determine equipment availability, mail condition and other pertinent information necessary for smooth transition. Briefly meet with unit employees to discuss daily targets/goals.
Site Specific Information	Supervision divided among several supervisors.
Safety	Good housekeeping, weekly safety talks.
Scheduling of Breaks & Lunches	Locally determined procedures should be inserted.
Staffing (Refer to attached employee roster, including craft, overtime desired list and sources for relief)	Typically, 18 employees/day on weekdays, 13 employees/day on Saturdays. 1 each/AFCS/Mark II/Dual Pass/Loose Mail System/Flyers/Flats Canceler. 5 for break & lunch relief, 2 for meter belt and 1 for internal transport. Saturday does not require relief.
End Tour Routine	Perform walk through of area to ascertain whether all mail has been removed accordingly. Reassign employees as needed. Generate and/or complete all required reports for submission to appropriate offices. Interface with subsequent tour supervisor.
9. UNIT(S) OF COUNT	Pieces off end of run reports.
10. CONTINGENCY PLAN	See attached.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES (SOPS) — SAMPLE MODEL	
1. GENERAL INFORMATION	
SOP Control Number	
Date	
Office	
Important Phone Numbers	
2. OPERATION INFORMATION	
Operation Name	
Operation Location	
Operation Number(s)	
Operation Description	
Operation Objective	
3. HOURS	
Critical Entry Time (CET)	
Clearance Time (CT)	
Hours of Operation (See Operating Plan)	
Peak Hours	
4. VOLUME AND PRODUCTIVITY	
Average Daily Volume	
Productivity Targets	

5. FLOW OF MAIL	
Sources of Mail (Operations & Locations)	
Downflow/Destination of Mail	
6. EQUIPMENT	
Initial Support Equipment	
Number & Type of Machines Used Daily (Weekday/Weekend)	
7. PROCESSING TOOLS	
Auto/Mech/Manual-Sort Plans/Case Diagrams	
8. ROUTINE OPERATION	
Begin Tour Routine	
Site Specific Information	
Safety	
Scheduling of Breaks & Lunches	
Staffing (Refer to attached employee roster, including craft, overtime desired list and sources for relief)	
End Tour Routine	
9. UNIT(S) OF COUNT	
10. CONTINGENCY PLAN	

Appendix B

Unscheduled Leave Requests

B-1 Model 1

Questions to be asked of employees calling for unscheduled sick leave (USL) or emergency annual leave (EAL). ***Note:*** The supervisor taking the call must complete PS Form 3971, *Request for or Notification of Absence,* and must attach it to this sheet.

1. Employee requesting leave: _____
2. Date: __/__/__
3. SSN: ____-____-_____
4. Pay location: _____
5. Scheduled report time: _____
6. Time of call-in: _____
7. Why are you unable to report as scheduled for work today? _____
8. What type of leave are you requesting? ( ) Sick Leave ( ) Emergency Annual ( ) Other (specify)
9. Can you perform your duties? ( ) Yes ( ) No
10. Why are you requesting this leave? ( ) Illness ( ) Off-the-job injury ( ) On-the-job injury or work-related
11. When do you expect to return to work? _____
12. Number of leave hours requested: _____
13. Telephone number where you can be reached: _____
14. If hospitalized, name of hospital: _____

The supervisor must tell the employee the following:

- Your leave will be recorded on PS Form 3971. This conversation is not an approval for your leave. Approval will be determined upon your return.

For each of the following statements that applies, the supervisor must circle the appropriate term:

a. You (will/may) be required to provide acceptable medical documentation.

b. You (will/may) be called back. If you do not have a telephone number where you can be reached, you must call back at (time/date): _____

c. You (will/will not) have to call in tomorrow.

Supervisor recording call: _____

Manager Distribution Operations review: _____

Plant Manager review: _____

B-2 Model 2

Date: __/__/__

To: Manager, Distribution Operations (MDO)
Plant Manager (After MDO review)

Employee requesting leave: _____.

Listed below is the Unscheduled Absence Analysis for the above-named employee.

Time Period	Hours Used	Percentage
Last 12 months (2080 hours)		
Last 6 months (1040 hours)		
Last 3 months (520 hours)		

The following action will be taken concerning this employee:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please attach call-in sheet and PS Form 3972, *Absence Analysis,* and send them to the manager of Distribution Operations on the same day the employee calls in. It will be returned to the supervisor of Distribution Operations after review.

Appendix C

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AADC	automated area distribution center
ADC	area distribution center
AFCS/ISS	advanced facer canceler system/input subsystem
API	Automation Proficiency Improvement
BCS	barcode sorter
CET	critical entry time
CSBCS	carrier sequence barcode sorter
CT	clearance time
DAR	decision analysis report
DBCS	delivery barcode sorter
DCO	data conversion operator
DOV	dispatch of value
DSU	decision storage unit
EXFC	External First-Class Measurement System
FSMOCR	flat sorting machine optical character reader
HWAI	handwritten analysis interpretation
IPSS	image processing subsystem
ISS	input subsystem
JOE	justification of expenditures
JSA	job safety analysis
LAMM	late arriving managed mail
MCR	mail condition report
MLOCR	multiline optical character reader
MODS	management operating data system
MPBCS	mail processing barcode sorter
MTE	mail transport equipment
MTESC	mail transport equipment service center
OCR	optical character reader
ODIS	Origin Destination Information System
OSS	output subsystem
P&DC	processing and distribution center
PETE	Priority End To End
RCR	remote computer reader
REC	remote encoding center

Appendix D

Glossary

advanced facer canceler system/input subsystem (AFCS/ISS) — An electro-mechanical mail-handling system that uses the latest optical character recognition (OCR) technology to rapidly cull, position (face), cancel, print ID Tags on certain types of mailpieces, verify printed ID Tags, scan the mailpiece address, store and transfer mailpiece images from the image management system (IMS) portion of the AFCS/ISS to the image processing subsystem (IPSS), and sort standard-sized mailpieces.

area distribution center (ADC) — A mail processing facility that receives and distributes mail destined for specific ZIP Codes under the Managed Mail Program (MMP). An ADC is one of the points within the national MMP distribution network.

automated area distribution center (AADC) — A distribution center that uses multiline optical character readers (MLOCRs), barcode sorters (BCSs), and other equipment designed for processing automation-compatible mail. (Also see *area distribution center*.)

Automation Proficiency Improvement (API) — A program that measures how well people, equipment, and processes come together to effectively produce a quality product.

barcode sorter (BCS) — A computerized machine that sorts letter-size mail by using a barcode reader to interpret an imprinted barcode. This machine consists of a mail feed and transport unit, barcode reader, stacker module, and associated electronic equipment that can sort into a large number of separations.

carrier sequence barcode sorter (CSBCS) — An automated machine that sorts an individual carrier's mail, allowing the mail to go directly from the automation equipment in delivery sequence to the carrier for delivery to postal customers. The CSBCS is a smaller BCS designed for delivery units with 10 or more routes.

clearance time (CT) — The latest time that a type of mail (either class or destination) can pass through an operation to make the proper dispatch or delivery.

critical entry time (CET) — The latest time a particular class of transported mail can arrive at the destination post office to meet the service standard for mail processing, dispatch, and final delivery.

data conversion operator (DCO) — An employee at the remote encoding center (REC) who views images on a monitor and keys in the appropriate information to resolve the image.

decision analysis report (DAR) — A document recommending an investment of capitol equipment greater than $100,000.00; it is prepared by the requiring organization.

decision storage unit (DSU) — A temporary storage unit for resolved images waiting to be run on the output subsystem (OSS).

delivery barcode sorter (DBCS) — A computerized machine that is capable of sorting letter-size mail to the carrier delivery point (DPS) using a barcode reader to interpret an imprinted barcode.

dispatch of value (DOV) — The last dispatch of the day that is loaded on transportation in time to meet the service standard for the mail class or destination.

External First-Class Measurement (EXFC) — A system whereby a contractor performs independent service performance tests on certain types of First-Class Mail (that is, letters, flats, postcards) deposited in collection boxes and business mail chutes. It provides national, area, performance cluster, and city estimates, which are compared with USPS service goals. The results are released to the public quarterly by the consumer advocate.

flat sorting machine optical character reader (FSMOCR) — A machine that is equipped with OCR/BCR capability to locate and read address information and apply barcodes to OCR-readable non-barcoded flats. Image lift capabilities permit unreadable addresses to be processed and coded at remote locations within the same facility.

handwritten analysis interpretation (HWAI) — A software enhancement to the remote computer reader (RCR) that can resolve neatly written cursive and handwritten mailpieces.

image processing subsystem (IPSS) — Remote barcoding system (RBCS) equipment that receives, as input, images and data packets of unresolved mailpieces from one or more input subsystems (ISSs). Each IPSS is divided into two halves: one at the processing and distribution center (P&DC), and the other at the remote encoding center (REC). A remote computer reader (RCR) is located within the P&DC. Unreadable mailpiece images are transferred from the P&DC to the REC. Barcode results are transferred from the REC to the P&DC. The P&DC then transfers the barcode, as output, to one of several output subsystems (OSSs).

input subsystem (ISS) — A modified advanced facer canceler system (AFCS) or multiline optical character reader (MLOCR) used in the remote barcoding system (RBCS). An ISS has the ability to transfer images of unresolved mailpieces to the image processing subsystem (IPSS).

job safety analysis (JSA) — A procedure that analyzes a specific task to uncover hazards or accident-producing situations.

justification of expenditures (JOE) — A document recommending a capitol investment of $25,000.00 to $100,000.00; it is prepared by the requiring organization.

late arriving managed mail (LAMM) — Managed mail that arrives at a processing facility after critical entry time (CET).

mail condition report (MCR) — A system of reports that identifies and monitors problems in mail processing within a postal facility. It supports the development of resources necessary to meet the demands of fluctuating mail volume and service commitments.

mail processing barcode sorter (MPBCS) — See *barcode sorter (BCS).*

mail transport equipment (MTE) — Containers used for mail processing or transportation within or between facilities by the USPS, its customers, or contractors. These include general purpose mail containers, tray carts, bulk mail center containers, platform trucks/trailers, hampers, special purpose containers, in-plant and surface trays, pallets, sacks, and pouches.

mail transport equipment service center (MTESC) — A field installation designated to receive, store, ship, examine, sort, pack, and condemn mailbags. It also issues, stores, and ships locks for mailbag equipment.

Management Operating Data System (MODS) — A system used with the Postal Source Data System that provides local postal management with information on the relationship between workloads and actual hours versus planned hours.

multiline optical character reader (MLOCR) — An optical character reader that reads and interprets more than one line of the delivery address on a mailpiece.

optical character reader (OCR) — An automated mail sorting machine that interprets the address information on a letter-size mailpiece and sprays the corresponding ZIP Code information onto the piece as a barcode. The OCR consists of a mail feed unit, transport unit, stacker modules, computer with a control system, video monitor, and printer. (Also see *multiline optical character reader.*)

Origin Destination Information System (ODIS) — An information system by which data on mail volume, service standard analysis, and other mail characteristics are collected, developed, and reported in a variety of formats for USPS management.

output subsystem (OSS) — A mail processing barcode sorter (MPBCS) or delivery barcode sorter (DBCS) modified for use in the remote barcoding system (RBCS). An OSS receives barcode data from the image processing subsystem (IPSS) equipment and prints barcodes on mailpieces that were previously unresolved by the input subsystem (ISS).

Priority End To End (PETE) — A system that measures service standards for Priority Mail; similar to EXFC.

remote computer reader (RCR) — An enhancement to the image processing subsystem (IPSS) that provides the capability to completely resolve some handwritten or machine-printed images that the input subsystem (ISS) was unable to barcode.

remote encoding center (REC) — A USPS unit that uses advanced technology to assign barcodes to hand-addressed mailpieces physically located at a general mail facility. After the mailpiece image is displayed on a computer terminal, an operator, who is at the center, keys in the ZIP Code and the street address in order to match this information with that in a database. This allows for the imprinting of the barcode and automated mail processing at the general mail facility.