



Delivering to blocked mailboxes

It seems that some post offices have a policy of skipping delivery to mailboxes when they are blocked by a car, a trash can or some other obstruction. Carriers are told to bring the mail back and mark it as “box blocked” or something similar. The mail is then re-attempted the following day. Often, mail will go undelivered to a box for several days until the obstruction is removed. This practice is wrong and should be stopped.

Postal regulations require that carriers dismount to deliver to a box that is temporarily blocked. Postal Operations Manual 632.14 states:

The customer is responsible for keeping the approach to his or her mailbox clear to facilitate delivery. **Where the approach to the mail receptacle located at the curb is temporarily blocked by a parked vehicle during normal delivery hours for the area, or snow or ice hampers the approach to the mailbox, the carrier normally dismounts to make delivery.** If the carrier continually experiences a problem in serving curblines and where the customer is able to control on-street parking in front of his or her mailbox but does not take prompt corrective action after being properly notified, the postmaster may, with the approval of the district manager, withdraw delivery service. (Emphasis supplied.)

The above regulation makes it clear that if a box is temporarily blocked, the carrier must dismount to deliver the mail. The USPS Standard Training Program for City Letter Carriers (p 16.2.3) instructs: “If the approach to the mailbox is blocked, delivery must be attempted by dismounting where it is safe to do so.” This applies whether the box is blocked by a vehicle, a trash can or even snow or ice.

Delivery can only be withheld if the problem is continual.

Note: Continual means repeated, not intermittent or occasional. Additionally, the customer must also have some control or ability to do something about the obstruction. In most places, on-street parking is not under the control of the resident/patron, unless it happens to be his/her own vehicle that is blocking the box. Even if it's the cus-

tomers' vehicle, delivery can only be withheld if the customer fails to remove the obstruction after being properly notified and only if the postmaster has the approval of the district manager.

Where this policy exists, NALC branches should request, either by letter or through a labor-management meeting, that management change the local policy to conform to POM 632.14. If they refuse, a grievance should be filed. Management may try to argue past practice claiming, “We've had this policy for years.” As we have mentioned previously, a past practice cannot override clear contract language. It doesn't matter how long it was done that way; if it's against postal regulations, it must cease.

Some carriers may not be happy about this, as they consider it a hassle having to park the vehicle and dismount to make the delivery. As with the other similar scenarios, point out to these carriers that they will get paid for each second it takes to dismount to make a delivery. As letter carriers, we work for a service-oriented company. All we have to sell is our service.

Dismounting to make such deliveries is not only required by regulation, it provides good service to our customers. In most instances, customers cannot control the on-street parking in front of their mailboxes, nor can they control where the garbage collectors leave their trash cans. So why should your customers be denied their mail because of something someone else did that they have no control over?

Think about how you feel when you are the recipient of poor customer service, especially when it would only take a few seconds to correct. Is that how you want your patrons to feel about you and the Postal Service? Now, think about a time when you were a customer and some employee went out of their way to help you. How did that make you feel about the company and the employee that was assisting you? That is how we want our customers to feel about letter carriers and about the Postal Service. It's just good common sense. Think of it as preserving your job, one delivery at a time. And besides that, it's the decent thing to do. ☒