

The Local Line

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The Official Voice of the
Northwest Illinois Area Local

Local Update by Jackie Engelhart

Floor Edition

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Information Meeting

The quarterly Information Meeting for the Northern Illinois District (NID) was held at Carol Stream on January 17, 2006. The meeting was coordinated by Human Resources Manager Phyliss Lingenfelter and led by District Manager Lynn Smith. The purpose of this meeting is to share information with the unions concerning the business side of USPS and the NID. I would like to share what was shared with us.

E. Lynn Smith

Mr. Smith started out by saying that the employees are gold and should be treated like gold. He stated he has been spending a lot of time away from his family to attend meetings with every supervisor in the district to impress upon them that the employees should be treated well. Mr. Smith then proceeded to talk about how the District will be implementing a program to separate employees who cannot do the job they were hired for. He stated the Postal Service

cannot afford to pay two people to do one job, and that each employee costs approximately \$17,000 dollars in benefits. We were told the "USPS/OWCP Rehabilitation Initiative", also known as the **Outsourcing / Outplacement Pilot Program**, will begin in the NID within months. "Out" is exactly what USPS wants to do to employees who cannot do their regular job because they were injured on their regular job! We were given more information from the NID Manager of Injury Compensation.

Gilbert Lopez

Mr. Lopez presented information from a handout we were given concerning results of the pilot programs in other districts. The first pilot site was Long Island, N Y. Out of 54 employees 36 "either returned to full duty, or increased productivity or elected retirement." 18 were "referred to OWCP for vocation placement." In Flushing, NY, out of 87 employees, 75 "either returned to full duty, or increased productivity, or

elected retirement." 12 employees were "referred to OWCP for vocational placement." In Brooklyn, NY 194 employees were identified and 152 "either returned to full duty, or increased productivity or elected retirement." 42 were "referred to OWCP for vocational placement." In San Diego, CA, out of 312 employees, 97 "either returned to full duty, or increased productivity or elected retirement." The data was not available for number of employee referred for vocational placement this district.

NID Numbers

Per the handout, "NID Data from the Summary Report for Fiscal Year 2006, 589 employees have some type of restrictions, of those 137 have returned to full duty and 413 are working in productive operations, 9 are working in non-productive operations (LDC 68 & 69), 30 are case files pending review. These are employees with approved on the job injury claims and do not include light duty. We were told the "non-productive" employees may be targeted first.

Information Meeting

E. Lynn Smith

Gilbert Lopez

NID Numbers

Questions?

What is USPS Obligation to employees injured on the Job?

What is Vocational Rehab.?

Why would USPS separate/fire employees injured on the job?

Who should be concerned?

Is Postal work available?

Voice of the Employee

50-50 Drive ends on January 31st.

Questions?

1. What will happen to USPS employee benefits as a result of being placed under the OWCP Vocational Programs? (they will not be treated like gold)

1. They will be separated from the USPS rolls. 2. Benefit entitlement will either cease or be charged at the OPM rate with the exception of wages. (USPS will not pay for benefits). 3. Wage benefits will either decrease or terminate, depending on the wage scale earnings or potential at time of final placement. (Your pay rate is frozen when you are separated).

2. What is USPS obligation to employees injured on the Job?

Per the Employee & Labor Relations Manual (ELM) section 546.14 "Obligation" "When an employee has partially overcome a compensable disability, the USPS must make every effort toward assigning the employee to limited duty consistent with the employee's medically defined work limitation tolerance. In assigning such limited duty, the USPS should minimize any adverse or disruptive impact on the employee."

3. What is Vocational Rehab.?

Per OWCP Injury Compensation Manual for Federal Employees CA-810, "An employee with extended disability may be considered for rehabilitation services if requested by the attending physician, the employee, or agency personnel. In addition, OWCP will routinely consider a case for rehabilitation services if the agency cannot reemploy the employee."

4. Why would USPS separate/fire employees injured on the job?

USPS is a business. Just as United Airlines (and others that

Followed) dumped employee pensions, USPS is making a real effort to dump employees. Just as United, is no longer responsible for employee pensions, USPS would no longer be responsible for benefits for their employees. They would retain the salary level they earned at the time of placement/separation. USPS would no longer be responsible for health insurance, life insurance, and retirement contributions. The employee would not be a postal employee and could not make further contributions to their retirement plan. (Postal union rights would be eliminated) USPS is trying to save money by dumping injured employees on OWCP. This will save money and improve their finances. The District Finance Manager reported that first class volume and revenue continue to decline, while costs continue to rise. The salary and benefits of employees is the largest cost and USPS must continue to be more efficient.

5. Who Should be Concerned?

All Postal employees should be concerned. For management to say employees are gold and then talk about separating employees injured on the job is cause for concern. For those of us who are not injured, that could change tomorrow. You could become injured at any time. If that injury becomes long-term or permanent, and you cannot perform your regular job, you too could be subject to "Vocational Rehabilitation".

6. Is Postal Work Available?

There is still plenty of work available for injured employees. If employees who could return to their job did so, there should be more than enough work for the injured employees. The unions will certainly use all available means to defend our injured employees.

Voice of the Employee

Lynn Smith told us NID's scores on "Voice of the Employee" are at the bottom for the Great Lakes Area. He asked that the unions not discourage employees from filling out these surveys. He asked why we ask our employees not to participate. Many union leaders in the room gave strong statements on why they are against VOE., and they all sounded very familiar. The issues affecting the workplace environment are not being addressed, and they are only getting worse. As USPS continues to cut staffing, employees are being pushed harder to make up for the reduction. It is also harder to get leave and to be off on the holiday schedule. We have an aging workforce and this combination of factors is creating a worsening morale problem. (Add to this the fact that employees will now be scared to death to get injured on the job.) I spoke with an old friend of mine at Palatine the other day and she told me (without prompting) that morale is way down. I told her I would love to hear from more employees on this subject. VOE asks the questions management is concerned about and it's a national survey. I suggest that senior management meet with groups of employees if they really want to know why morale is low. Do they want to know what is wrong or do they want the surveys filled out? I encourage employees to write statements about what is going on the workroom floor and forward them to me. This does not have to be signed, but should include your tour and facility. VOE=Union. 50-50 Drive ends January 31st.

JS