

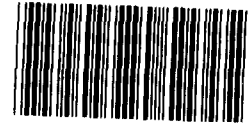


General Government Division

B-250112

September 2, 1992

The Honorable William S. Broomfield
House of Representatives



147501

Dear Mr. Broomfield:

This is to report to you on our agreement to examine the extent to which management practices prior to the November 14, 1991, tragedy at the post office in Royal Oak, MI were subsequently reviewed and changed by the United States Postal Service (USPS). On April 8, 1992, we wrote you with respect to USPS' actions on behalf of the victims of the shootings at Royal Oak, and we are still at work on a report to you concerning the validity of USPS' Customer Satisfaction Index survey.

Shortly after the tragedy the Chief Postal Inspector authorized a four phase review to identify underlying causes of workplace violence and potential preventive actions. The four phases are

- a description and analysis of the tragedy and events leading up to it,
- an in-depth look at the USPS hiring process,
- a profiling of former and current employees who have committed violent attacks on the postal workforce, and
- an exploration of the relationship of stress, management practices, and employee behavior to look at the feasibility of predicting and intervening to prevent workplace violence.

The first phase has now been completed. It involved on-site work at the Royal Oak post office, 119 interviews (with managers, supervisors, craft employees, and union officials), and a voluminous report (273 pages not including 343 exhibits) which we examined though it has not been released to the public. In our opinion the report provides a comprehensive and objective disclosure of the work environment at Royal Oak prior to the November 1991 tragedy. It fully explores how operational efficiencies were achieved by an aggressive management approach combined with curtailment of customer services. Operational efficiencies were obtained by

GAO/GGD-92-29R, Royal Oak Tragedy

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- late (sometimes after dark) mail delivery caused by changing work schedules of letter carriers,
- curtailment of retail window service before and after holidays,
- removal of mail collection boxes and earlier collection times,
- delayed delivery of advertising mail, and
- tight management of letter carrier time in the office and on the street.

An acting Manager/Postmaster was appointed shortly after the tragedy. He moved immediately to stop practices that adversely affected customer services and employee relations. The number of mail collection boxes was increased, earlier starting times for letter carriers were authorized, emphasis was placed on not having delayed mail and late delivery, and efforts were made to restore harmony at the workplace.

To supplement the Inspection Service report we extended our presence in the Royal Oak area into July 1992. Our work involved visits to several post offices, discussions with Postmasters and other management officials, and observations of workroom activities and retail window service. We also examined internal USPS reports on delayed mail, customer complaints, and workhour usage.

Our impression from these visits and observations is that postal service in the Royal Oak area still has problems but, compared to last year, is better balanced between operational efficiency and treatment of customers and employees. Work hour usage is below last year's level but is slightly above budget. Customer complaint data show that service has not, however, improved from last year's level.

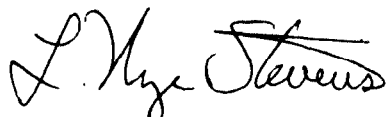
It is unlikely that service indicators will improve over the balance of the year. In July of this year, ZIP Codes in the Royal Oak delivery area were changed for about 81,000 residential deliveries. ZIP Code changes, made to accommodate growth and to prepare carrier routes for automated mail processing, will disrupt service until the new codes are widely used. Such use is not expected to occur before the end of 1992.

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In summary, the Postal Inspection Service's report fully demonstrates that your concern about the management of postal services in Royal Oak was well-founded, even before the events of November 14, 1991. We are also convinced that the Postal Service has fully and objectively analyzed the conditions that caused customer and employee criticisms, and taken positive steps to reverse the most significant ones.

If you or your staff have questions or need additional information on the above matters please call me on (202) 275-8676 or Willis Elmore on (202) 268-4950.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "L. Nye Stevens". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

L. Nye Stevens
Director, Government Business
Operations and Information Issues

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