GAO: Postal health plan could hike costs

Some U.S. Postal Service workers and retirees could face sharply higher costs under the mail carrier's plan to create its own health insurance program, according to the Government Accountability Office.

Although the bulk of almost 1 million active workers and retirees would pay about the same or less for premiums as under the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program, higher deductibles and out-of-pocket maximums would potentially mean thousands of dollars in extra expenses for some workers, as well as retirees not yet eligible for Medicare, the GAO found in a newly released report.

Among the factors that would affect their expenses, according to the report: the amount and cost of care that they use, whether they have family coverage and their reliance on out-of-network providers.

USPS human resources chief Jeffrey Williamson countered that the proposed plan would provide the great majority of enrollees with "comparable or superior health benefits, at a lower cost to participants" in a written response attached to the report.

The Postal Service will begin distributing 175,000 mobile phones to speed data collection and improve communication.

JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

USPS gives 175K cellphones to carriers

By ANDY MEDICI
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The U.S. Postal Service is deploying about 175,000 mobile phones as part of its plan to collect real-time data and enable wireless communication from employees in the field, according to a top agency official.

John Edgar, the vice president of information technology, said postal letter carriers have long been equipped with scanners that log the time and location of deliveries but have lacked a way to upload that information instantly at the point of delivery. Postal workers would have to return to a postal facility to load the data into online tracking systems.

"We would have hours of unavailable tracking data that we were not able to present back to our customers or the mailers," he said.

But now the agency has been rolling out Bluetooth-enabled cellphones that can take the information from the scanner and upload it in real time, according to Edgar.

"Now, by getting that data in real time, we are able to much more efficiently and timely present that data to people that are querying the packages so that they have better ability to track the packages and know where they are," he said.

Edgar said the Postal Service will fully deploy the cellphones by the end of September. He added that this was the first step in building out the capabilities that postal workers could have in the field. He said he could not specifically list what capabilities they were developing but that they would be able to enhance what postal workers would be able to do for customers.

"There are a number of services we are envisioning that, once we have real time communications and potentially voice communications to the carriers, that we would be able to use to enhance the capabilities that they have and the things they can do on their route," Edgar said.

He said the Postal Service IT structure is one of the largest and most complex in the world and the agency is always looking for ways to improve its process or cut costs.

Mobile devices are central to that strategy, Edgar said. Advances in technology allow the agency to lower costs and improve their data analysis and put that information into the hands of employees who need it when they need it.

He said while the agency does not allow postal workers to accept payments while delivering items, the new wireless capability would give the agency that capability.

"With the technology, we would have the capability if we chose to do so," Edgar said. □

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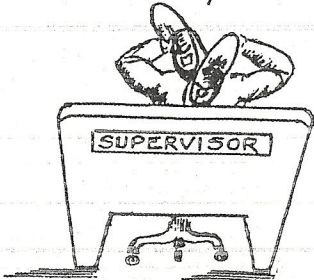
ODDS AND ENDS

* At the Pennsylvania State Convention in Pittsburgh a bylaw change was approved to hold state conventions every 3 years instead of every 2 years. This was done in part to save money. Joe Antel from Johnstown was reelected as the President of the state association.

* Currently Amazon.com is sending 25 million packages a year. By 2017, it is estimated that they will be shipping 900 million parcels annually. This is an increase of 36 times as many parcels. The same day East Coast experiment resulted in $800 million in new business.

* National Conventions - 2014 - Philadelphia   2016 - Los Angeles

* State Conventions - 2016 - State College.

* There are currently 8392 City Letter Carriers in the Pennsylvania.

* The Postal Service is planning to increase Postage rates by 3 cents (to 49 cents) on January 14, 2014.

* There are 3 Dispute Resolution Teams handling grievances in Pennsylvania. Our DRT is in Philadelphia.

* There is a joint national level committee attempting to develop a new procedure to adjust routes.

* USPS Business report: 2007 to 2012 - this was the worst 6 year period in the history of the Postal Service.

  $41 billion dollars in losses. 80% due to pre-funding costs. The great recession focused on mail intensive sectors such as housing and finance. Electronic substitution accelerated. Mail volume was down 54 billion pieces, including 33% of first class mail. The postal service lost 156,000 jobs (-22.5%)

Signs of recovery - Job growth is increasing, foreclosures are down, housing construction has increased. Annual shipping revenue $11.6 billion --- up $1.5 billion vs. 2010.

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SURE IS BORING AROUND HERE AFTER THEY LEAVE FOR THEIR ROUTES......

YEAH.... WHATS SAY WE GO OUT AND HARASS SOME CARRIERS ???

POST MASTER

SUPERVISOR

"Pardon me—when I suck the enthusiasm out of a new employee too quickly, I get gas!"