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**UNITED STATES
GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE**



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**Quality Of Mail Service
In Southeastern Wisconsin**

United States Postal Service

The Postal Service measures quality of service primarily in terms of delivery performance of first-class mail. More than 97 percent of first-class stamped mail committed to overnight service in southeastern Wisconsin arrives on time. Service is inconsistent for other classes of mail, however.

Mail distribution problems in southeastern Wisconsin most often involve either transportation foulups, human error, or equipment breakdowns. It is unlikely that these problems can be eliminated.

GGD-77-3

OCT. 22. 1976



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

GENERAL GOVERNMENT
DIVISION

B-114874

OCT 22 1976

The Honorable Les Aspin
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Aspin:

This report is in response to your request that we examine the quality of mail service in southeastern Wisconsin.

As your office requested, Postal Service comments have not been obtained, although the matters contained in the report were discussed with Service officials in southeastern Wisconsin.

Victor L. Lowe
Victor L. Lowe
Director

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ABBREVIATIONS

GAO	General Accounting Office
ODIS	Origin-Destination Information System
SCF	Sectional Center Facility

L

D I G E S T

First-class mail delivery service in southeastern Wisconsin meets or exceeds national and regional averages. Yet the public still complains about the quality of service.

HOW DOES SERVICE IN SOUTHEASTERN
WISCONSIN COMPARE TO OTHER AREAS?

The Postal Service measures quality of service primarily in terms of delivery performance on first-class mail, with emphasis on overnight delivery. Postal standards provide for

- 1-day (overnight) delivery within local areas,
- 2-day delivery within a 600-mile radius, and
- 3-day delivery for all other first-class mail.

The Service's goal is to meet these standards 95 percent of the time. (See p. 1.)

Statistics compiled by the Service's Origin-Destination Information System show that more than 97 percent of first-class stamped mail originating in or destined for southeastern Wisconsin (and committed to overnight delivery) arrives on time. This compares favorably to 94 percent for the 13-State Central Region and 95 percent nationwide.

Performance for second- and third-day delivery is between 91 and 92 percent. This also compares favorably to regional and national averages of 90 and 91 percent, respectively. (See p. 3.)

IF POSTAL SERVICE IS SO
GOOD WHY DO PEOPLE COMPLAIN?

In southeastern Wisconsin 3,844 complaints were filed with the Postal Service for the 6 months ended March 31, 1976. (See p. 9.)

Tear Sheet. Upon removal, the report cover date should be noted hereon.

Although nearly 45 percent of the complaints concerned poor mail delivery, many also expressed concern about such matters as service hours, personnel, money orders, and damage to parcel post. Following are some possible reasons for the complaints.

- Although only 3 percent of the first-class overnight mail handled by the Milwaukee Sectional Center Facility did not meet delivery standards, this represents about 4.8 million letters. This small percentage, particularly if it includes important mail, causes considerable dissatisfaction. Most of these letters no doubt were only a day or two late but some were excessively delayed, lost, mutilated, or destroyed.
- Service in certain areas served by the Milwaukee Sectional Center Facility is much worse than the average. For example, mail to Rockford, Illinois, from Milwaukee had a 75-percent ontime delivery record. (See p. 4.)

WHAT CAUSES DELIVERY PROBLEMS?

The mail distribution system involves a complex transportation and handling network; the potential for error is therefore great. Problems noted in southeastern Wisconsin involved

- transportation foulups, either mechanical or weather-related;
- human error in sorting and dispatching mail; and
- processing equipment breakdowns and malfunctions. (See p. 11.)

Local officials feel they have been doing the best job possible within budget limitations. They added that the staff-hour budget for fiscal year 1977 is about 9.6 percent (1 million staff-hours valued at about \$9 million) below fiscal year 1976 actual usage. According to the officials, this reduction is bound to hurt delivery performance in southeastern Wisconsin. (See p. 14.)

RECENT OR PLANNED CHANGES AT MILWAUKEE AND MADISON FACILITIES

The Postal Service has recently made or is planning to make certain changes in the distribution and processing systems at the Milwaukee and Madison Sectional Center Facilities.

They involve

- realigning mail sorting functions of sectional center facilities, increasing Milwaukee's daily volume by about 270,000 pieces;
- transferring some parcel post operations from the Milwaukee facility to the bulk mail facility at Chicago;
- bringing most first-class local post offices under the area mail processing concept to decrease the distribution and cancellation workload at the associate offices;
- relocating the Madison facility to a new larger building; and
- installing two letter sorting machines in the Madison facility. (See p. 16.)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Postal Service has developed an extensive mail collection, transportation, and distribution system. Under this system, mail is brought to a Sectional Center Facility (SCF) from collection points in an area to be processed and sent to its destination. The concept of centralized mail processing is based on the assumption that it is more efficient and economical than processing mail at thousands of local post offices. There are 555 SCFs across the Nation that process the mail for more than 30,000 local offices.

The Madison and Milwaukee SCFs serve 240 post offices, which in turn serve all or parts of 23 counties in southeastern Wisconsin. (See app. II.) Besides processing all incoming and outgoing mail for this area, the Milwaukee SCF serves as the arrival point (State distribution center) for all out-of-State mail destined for Wisconsin.

About 1.1 billion pieces of mail are processed annually at the Milwaukee SCF. It employs about 5,900 people and had estimated operating expenses for fiscal year 1976 of about \$108 million. Annual mail volume processed at the Madison SCF totaled about 379 million pieces. The Madison SCF employs about 2,100 people and had operating expenses for fiscal year 1976 of about \$36.6 million.

FIRST-CLASS MAIL DELIVERY STANDARDS

The Postal Service has established the following standards for delivery of first-class mail:

- 1 day (overnight) within designated areas (generally, within sectional center areas and among adjoining sectional center areas),
- 2 days for mail within a 600-mile radius, and
- 3 days for all other first-class mail.

These standards apply to all first-class mail, including stamped, franked, and government, which has the proper address and ZIP code and which is posted by the last mail pickup time--generally 5 p.m. The Service's goal is to deliver 95 percent of the first-class mail within these standards.

DELIVERY COMMITMENTS
IN SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

The Service has established standards or goals for second-, third-, and fourth-class mail, but the most important standard to the Service is overnight delivery of first-class mail. One-day delivery commitments are generally made only to those areas for which postal management expects to deliver 95 percent of the mail overnight. The Milwaukee SCF's overnight areas differ, depending on whether the mail is destined for or originates in the Milwaukee SCF areas. Mail destined for six adjoining SCF areas--Rockford and North Suburban in Illinois and Madison, Portage, Oshkosh, and Green Bay in Wisconsin--is committed to overnight delivery. Only mail originating in the four adjacent Wisconsin SCF areas is committed to overnight delivery in the Milwaukee SCF area.

Mail originating in the Madison SCF area is committed to overnight delivery in seven adjoining SCF areas--Dubuque and Decrah in Iowa; North Suburban and Rockford in Illinois; and Milwaukee, Portage, and La Crosse in Wisconsin. Mail originating in all of these SCF areas, except Decorah, Iowa, is committed to overnight delivery in the Madison SCF area. (See app. III.)

In October 1975, the Service implemented, on a test basis, the Service Improvement Program which eliminated airmail and upgraded first-class mail service commitments.

Under this program, the Milwaukee SCF extended overnight delivery service to Chicago and 16 other cities. This overnight service to the 16 cities is accorded only to mail deposited at the Milwaukee post office by 2, 3, or 4 p.m., depending upon the city. The SCF also extended 2-day delivery service to 14 new areas.

Under the same program, the Madison SCF extended overnight delivery service to 12 cities outside the normal overnight delivery area. Two-day delivery service was also extended to 19 areas that had previously received 3-day delivery service. (See app. IV.)

CHAPTER 2

THE QUALITY OF MAIL SERVICE IN SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

The Postal Service measures the quality of service primarily in terms of delivery performance for first-class mail. Postal Service statistics show that for fiscal year 1976 through March 26, 1976, delivery of first-class stamped mail committed to overnight service in southeastern Wisconsin exceeded the Service's goal of 95-percent ontime delivery. Although 2- and 3-day service met or exceeded national and regional averages for ontime deliveries, it did not meet the Service's 95-percent goal.

Even if all Postal Service goals were met, many millions of pieces of mail would still be delivered late in southeastern Wisconsin. This causes complaints. Timeliness of first-class mail is not the only matter of public concern in the area, however. Concern also exists over delivery performance for second-, third-, and fourth-class mail; timely receipt of parcel post without damage; window and collection hours; employee courtesy; postage rates; and other matters.

PERFORMANCE FOR OVERNIGHT DELIVERY OF FIRST-CLASS MAIL IS GOOD

The Postal Service's commitment is to deliver overnight 95 percent of first-class mail originating in the Milwaukee SCF and destined for southern or eastern Wisconsin or northern Illinois. The overnight delivery commitment for mail destined for Milwaukee includes only southern and eastern Wisconsin.

Statistics indicating how well the Service achieves its goals are collected under its Origin-Destination Information System (ODIS). Under the system, delivery time is measured from the date mail is postmarked to the date it reaches the last delivery unit before being placed in the addressee's hands. ODIS does not recognize delays that can occur before postmarking or in delivery.

Because the Postal Service does not postmark franked and metered mail, ODIS cannot measure its delivery performance as accurately as that of stamped mail. Nevertheless, we have no evidence that franked and metered mail is handled differently from stamped mail once it enters the processing system or that its delivery performance is much different.

ODIS statistics for southeastern Wisconsin for fiscal year 1976 (through March 26, 1976) show that 97 percent of the Milwaukee SCF and 98 percent of the Madison SCF first-class stamped mail committed to overnight delivery arrived on time. The performance of these SCFs exceeded the 13-State Central Region overnight delivery average of 94 percent and the national average of 95 percent.

Although only a very small percentage of the first-class overnight stamped mail going through these SCFs does not meet the standard, this represents a sizeable number of letters. For example, the 3 percent of the first-class overnight stamped mail going through the Milwaukee SCF and not meeting the standard represents 4.8 million pieces annually. Most of these letters will be a day or two late; some, however, can be excessively delayed, lost, mutilated, or destroyed. Obviously, such a large volume of late mail can cause substantial customer dissatisfaction.

The following table illustrates overnight delivery performance to and from the Milwaukee SCF area during the period.

Overnight <u>area</u>	Percent delivered <u>on time</u>	
	Mail originating in Milwaukee SCF <u>area</u>	Mail destined for delivery in <u>Milwaukee SCF area</u>
Total SCF	97	97
Local and intra-SCF	98	98
Madison, WI SCF	96	96
Portage, WI SCF	89	96
Green Bay, WI SCF	92	91
Oshkosh, WI SCF	94	90
North Suburban, IL SCF	71	(a)
Rockford, IL SCF	75	(a)

a/ Not included.

Overnight Delivery Performance
of the Madison SCF
For July 1, 1975, to March 26, 1976

Overnight area	Percent delivered on time	
	Mail originating in Madison SCF area	Mail destined for delivery in Madison SCF area
Total SCF	98	98
Local and intra-SCF	99	99
Decorah	97	(a)
Portage	97	99
North Suburban	81	81
Dubuque	96	92
Milwaukee	96	96
La Crosse	95	98
Rockford	91	95

a/ Not included.

The above tables show that not all geographical areas receive the same quality service. For example, letters from the Milwaukee SCF to the Portage SCF receive overnight delivery 89 percent of the time whereas letters from Milwaukee to Madison receive such service 96 percent of the time. Some postal patrons may be dissatisfied with this lower percentage of ontime delivery to some areas.

Another potential area of customer dissatisfaction is situations in which mail moving in one direction receives better service than that moving in the opposite direction. As shown in the table, the Postal Service commits itself to overnight delivery of mail from Milwaukee to northern Illinois. Yet, it has not made the same commitment for mail moving in the opposite direction because of the large volume of mail being handled by the North Suburban SCF and transportation scheduling problems.

How then can overall delivery performance be 97 percent when areas such as Rockford receive only 75-percent delivery performance? Primarily because most mail (86 to 90 percent) committed to overnight delivery originates and is destined for addresses within the Milwaukee SCF area. This large volume, 98 percent of which is delivered on time, limits the impact on the statistics of the poorer service rendered in the other overnight areas.

Milwaukee SCF and district officials were aware that some areas are not consistently receiving overnight service that meets Postal Service goals. They believe that the problem primarily involves inconsistencies in the transportation network.

Correcting this problem would require additional transportation routes and personnel, measures which, in their opinion, are not economically feasible.

PERFORMANCE FOR 2- AND 3-DAY
FIRST-CLASS MAIL MEETS OR EXCEEDS
NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PERFORMANCE

For mail to and from both the Milwaukee and Madison SCF areas, the Postal Service has committed itself to 2-day service within the region and 3-day service to the rest of the country. The Service's goal is for 95 percent of the mail to be delivered within these standards.

Milwaukee SCF delivery performance to 2- and 3-day areas, while not meeting standards, generally equaled or exceeded national and regional performance. The following table contrasts national, regional, and Milwaukee SCF delivery performance for fiscal year 1976 (through March 26, 1976).

Percentage of Mail Delivered on Time

<u>Delivery area</u>	<u>Originating mail</u>			<u>Destination mail</u>		
	<u>National</u>	<u>Regional</u>	<u>Milwaukee SCF</u>	<u>National</u>	<u>Regional</u>	<u>Milwaukee SCF</u>
2-day	91	91	91	91	90	92
3-day	90	90	91	90	91	92

Milwaukee SCF officials said that they were aware that 2- and 3-day mail was not delivered within the standards and that the problem primarily involves transportation. They maintained that the longer the transportation network, the greater the chance for problems.

EXPANDED FIRST-CLASS MAIL SERVICE
HAS NOT BEEN SUCCESSFUL

In October 1975, the Postal Service implemented, on a test basis, the Service Improvement Program which eliminated airmail and upgraded first-class mail service commitments. This was to be achieved primarily by expanding overnight and 2-day delivery areas.

Under this program:

--Milwaukee SCF mail was to receive overnight service to Chicago.

--City of Milwaukee mail was to be delivered overnight to 16 other cities.

--Milwaukee SCF mail was to be delivered within 2 days to 14 areas that previously had a 3-day delivery standard.

--Madison SCF mail was to be delivered overnight to 12 cities outside the normal overnight delivery area.

--Two-day delivery service from Madison SCF was also extended to 19 former 3-day delivery areas.

A map was prominently posted in the lobby of the Milwaukee Post Office informing the public of the service it could expect under the program. (For a list of new areas, see app. IV.) The Service's goal was to achieve 95-percent ontime delivery from the Milwaukee SCF to these areas.

The following table shows that for certain areas ^{1/} service was inconsistent and the 95-percent goal was rarely attained.

4-week periods (1975-76)	Percent of mail delivered overnight to <u>Chicago</u>	Percent of mail delivered to selected States within 2 days				
		<u>CA</u>	<u>CT</u>	<u>NJ</u>	<u>NY</u>	<u>PA</u>
10/11-11/07	53	55	91	63	62	92
11/08-12/05	67	70	81	48	83	85
12/06-01/02	40	20	42	26	54	80
01/03-01/30	61	37	30	55	60	82
01/31-02/27	64	51	45	90	87	83
02/28-03/26	72	60	35	65	82	94

What do these statistics mean for postal patrons in the Milwaukee area? Basically, that the Service is not meeting its goal under this program. Unless improvements are made, the postal patrons will in time conclude that the Postal Service is advertising service that it cannot deliver, causing dissatisfaction and complaints.

^{1/} Because of limitations in the Service's measurement system, an accurate measure of delivery performance is not available for all areas.

SECOND-, THIRD-, AND FOURTH-CLASS
MAIL SERVICE IS INCONSISTENT

Although the Service has established delivery standards for these classes of mail, it only measures performance for parcel post. We believe that postal patrons can expect inconsistent delivery service for most second-, third-, and fourth-class mail because such mail has the lowest priority-- it is processed as time allows. The only exception is dated material, such as daily or weekly newspapers and magazines. Delivery of this type of mail should be better than that of other second- and third-class mail because it is next in priority after first-class mail.

Parcel post service

Parcel post delivery standards range from overnight within the Milwaukee SCF area to 8 days to California based primarily on distance from the Milwaukee SCF.

The following table shows parcel delivery performance for the Milwaukee SCF area, the Central Region, and the Nation during fiscal year 1976 (through February 27, 1976).

Delivery area	Percent delivered on time					
	Milwaukee origin	Central region	Nation	Milwaukee destination	Central region	Nation
Overnight (note a)	83	62	52	83	62	52
2-day	65	58	58	52	58	58
3-day	72	46	53	76	45	53
4-day	63	37	47	52	39	47
5-day	51	32	43	57	42	43
6-day	44	36	42	59	32	42
7-day	64	43	40	60	35	40
8-day	75	47	44	80	40	44

a/National averages are much lower than comparable averages for fiscal year 1975. The marked decrease was caused by startup problems of the National Bulk Mail System.

These statistics indicate that postal patrons in southeastern Wisconsin have been receiving better parcel service than those in both the region and the Nation. However, service is inconsistent among various geographic areas and falls short of the Service's goals.

Customers have complained of parcel damage, and we believe such complaints have merit. At the Milwaukee SCF, we observed parcel handling several times from April to July 1976 and saw parcels jammed together on conveyor belts, dropped 12 to 15 inches from one conveyor system to another, smashed at the bottom of long chutes by other parcels, and tossed 5 to 10 feet into pouches. Such handling is not conducive to avoiding damage. We also noted parcels marked "fragile" treated the same as other packages.

According to Service statistics, over the last 18 months, an average of about 13,200 parcels per 4-week accounting period have required some rewrapping by Milwaukee SCF personnel. Although this represents a small percentage of the average total volume of over 3 million parcels per period, the patron whose parcel is damaged is likely to be dissatisfied.

Milwaukee SCF officials said changes have been made in handling parcel post. (See p. 17.)

POSTAL PATRONS' VIEWS OF SERVICE

On October 1, 1975, the Service initiated a nationwide program to provide customers with a means to complain and offer suggestions to the Service. Under this program, the customer completes a two-part consumer service card; one part for the local post office, the other for postal headquarters. Upon receiving a complaint, the local postmaster is responsible for resolving the problem with the complainant. When the problem has been resolved, the resolution is reported to postal headquarters where it is analyzed.

During a recent 6-month period, 4,174 consumer service cards were filed for the Milwaukee SCF area. As indicated below, 3,844 were complaints, of which 1,722 (about 45 percent) concerned delivery problems. The following table shows the customer concerns by area.

Complaints about mail delivery:	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Letters	1,203	28.8
Parcel post	321	7.7
Newspapers/magazines	191	4.6
Advertisements	<u>7</u>	<u>.2</u>
	<u>1,722</u>	<u>41.3</u>
Complaints other than mail delivery:		
Hours of service	437	10.4
Self-service postal units	1,536	36.8
Money orders	3	.1
Personnel	<u>146</u>	<u>3.5</u>
	<u>2,122</u>	<u>50.8</u>
Other:		
Information requests	81	1.9
Suggestions	188	4.5
Other (compliments, stamps, rates)	<u>61</u>	<u>1.5</u>
	<u>330</u>	<u>7.9</u>
Totals	<u>4,174</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Most delivery complaints concerned delays in receipt of mail. However, a number of such complaints concerned non-receipt of mail and damage to letters, magazines, and parcels. The many complaints about self-service postal units primarily concerned the failure of these units to work properly. Patrons noted that units were frequently out of stamps, did not make proper change, or simply would not work.

WHAT POSTAL PATRONS IN SOUTHEASTERN
WISCONSIN CAN EXPECT IN MAIL SERVICE

Barring dramatic technological breakthroughs or administrative decisions changing delivery standards, postal patrons in southeastern Wisconsin should probably not expect much better service than they now receive. A high percentage of mail will be delivered on time without problems; however, some mail service, especially for second-, third-, and fourth-class mail, will not measure up either to Postal Service goals or patrons' expectations. Service officials stressed that second-, third-, and fourth-class mail is processed after first-class mail and that only increased expenditures could improve delivery performance.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT CAUSES MAIL DELIVERY PROBLEMS?

Mail delivery problems have many causes. 1/ The mail distribution system involves a complex transportation and handling network; the potential for error is therefore great.

Problems noted in southeastern Wisconsin involved

- transportation foulups, either mechanical or weather-related;
- human error in sorting and dispatching mail;
- processing equipment breakdowns and malfunctions.

The problems noted above are inherent in a complex system and are often uncontrollable. The room for improvement in the Milwaukee SCF is therefore marginal. Postal personnel should be able to deliver first-class mail within the Service's standard 95 percent of the time. Beyond that, the current system may not permit much improvement.

Measuring the impact of a specific mail delivery problem on mail service is difficult because the impact will depend on the circumstances. For example, a delay of 1 hour in mail arriving at a local post office may or may not affect mail delivery. It depends on how tight the facility's processing schedule is and when the mail arrives. A mistake by the letter sorting machine operator may send a letter destined for New Berlin, Wisconsin, to Kenosha, Wisconsin, probably delaying delivery 1 day. However, the mistake could just as easily send the letter to Maine, delaying delivery several days.

The problems we noted at the Milwaukee SCF are discussed below.

TRANSPORTATION

The Postal Service moves mail by truck, rail, and air. The movement of a letter may involve more than one mode of transportation.

1/Our discussion focuses on handling of first-class mail, which represents about 70 percent of the mail handled by the Milwaukee SCF and is the basis for most delivery complaints.

The effectiveness of the transportation system depends on meeting arrival and departure schedules. Transportation delays occur--primarily because of weather and equipment breakdowns. Such delays, will often result in mail being delayed. The following examples illustrate the type of transportation delays encountered and their impact on mail delivery.

--The Milwaukee-Manitowoc-Green Bay, Wisconsin, route had 16 delays between June 1975 and May 1976. Problems included icy roads and dirt in the fuel line. Lengths of delays ranged from 19 minutes to 2 hours and 15 minutes.

--On September 18, 1975, the St. Louis SCF reported that eight pouches from Milwaukee (about 12,000 first-class letters) arrived after their cutoff time (the time by which all destination mail must be processed to meet the last outgoing transportation). Delivery of this mail was delayed 1 day. This late arrival was attributed to the air taxi being canceled at Midway Airport (Chicago) because of mechanical problems.

--On March 5, 1976, the Milwaukee SCF received about 2,400 first-class letters from Minneapolis 4 hours after operating cutoff time. Late arrival was attributed to cancellation of air-taxi service due to a blizzard. As a result, delivery of this mail was delayed 1 day.

PROCESSING

The key to an efficient processing system is the SCF. Mail arrives at SCFs in bags and is emptied onto a conveyor belt, where it is separated for processing. The originating stamped mail is routed through a canceling machine and on to a letter sorting machine. At this point, mail is sorted by ZIP codes and pouched by destination. Pouches are routed to transportation docks for transfer to local post offices, air terminals, or other SCFs.

According to Postal Service statistics, about 1.5 percent of Milwaukee SCF mail is sent or dispatched improperly (missent) within the region and about 2.6 percent is missent throughout the rest of the Nation. This compares favorably with a 1.9-percent missent rate for the 13-State central region and a 3.6-percent rate nationwide.

Letter sorting

The aspect of postal operations most critical to timely delivery is the sorting process. At the time of our review, all mail sorting at the Madison SCF was done by hand. In Milwaukee this process is done by letter sorting machines.

Each machine has 12 operating positions and usually has 2 loader who place letters on the console and 4 sweepers who take the sorted letters from bins. The operators depress keys corresponding to numbers in the letter's ZIP code or other special codes. These machines usually operate at 60 letters per minute; thus, the operator has 1 second to recognize and key certain numbers of the ZIP code. The operator cannot slow the machine or stop it to correct an error.

The computer interprets the operator's keying entry and directs the letters to 1 of 277 bins. Accumulated letters are taken from the bin, screened for correct destination, put in pouches labeled to show their destination, and released for transportation.

A mistake in this process, such as incorrectly keying the ZIP code, may cause letters to be missent. The machine may also malfunction and route mail to the wrong bin.

Statistics show that, during fiscal year 1976, in the Milwaukee SCF operators had keying error rates ranging from 0.1 to 7.9 percent. Machine error rates during this period ranged from zero to 2.1 percent. Cumulative statistics are not kept for operator and machine error.

We examined 3,244 letters after the sorting operation and found that 133 (4.1 percent) were incorrectly sorted. Some examples were:

- Of 15 letters in the La Crosse bin, 1 was addressed to Neenah and 1 to Burlington.
- Of 31 letters in the Mt. Calvary bin, 1 was addressed to Menomonee Falls.
- Of 21 letters in the Chippewa Falls bin, 14 should have been routed to Pewaukee, Wisconsin; Portland, Oregon; and various addresses in Texas.

If these errors were not caught in the sweeping operation, the letters would be routed to the wrong cities, and the mail would be delayed.

Sweeping

This process involves removing letters from the sorting bins and placing them in pouches. Generally, this is the last chance to catch a missorted letter before it enters the transportation network. To catch mistakes, the sweepers riffle the stack to look for mail that does not belong in the bin.

The effectiveness of this process depends greatly on the conscientiousness of the employee; but even at best, it is not a highly effective process.

We sampled 1,391 letters pouched for dispatch and found that 35 (2.5 percent) were destined to be missent. For example:

--One letter in the New York pouch was addressed to Eagle, Wisconsin.

--Of 35 letters in the Atlanta, Georgia, pouch, 1 was addressed to Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and 1 was addressed to Washington, D.C.

Such mistakes can clearly cause major problems for postal patrons.

Pouching

Errors can also be made in the pouching process. Once the mail is pouched, it is sent to the transportation area to be loaded on the correct truck.

We reviewed missent mail reports received from local post offices in southeastern Wisconsin. We found numerous examples of missent mail being received at these offices. Missent mail can result from sorting errors not caught by sweeping or from incorrect pouching. Unlike individual letter sorting and sweeping errors, pouching mistakes will result in larger numbers of letters being delayed.

Canceling

Another factor causing mail delay and postal customer frustration is mail that is damaged or destroyed during processing. Mutilation of mail will usually occur during canceling. This is a high speed operation--22,000 letters an hour--during which some mail can be thrown out of or caught in the mechanism. Statistics on the number of pieces mutilated by these machines are not maintained, but between June 1975 and May 1976, about 5,300 hours were required to repair mutilated mail at the Milwaukee SCF.

AGENCY COMMENTS

According to Milwaukee officials, these problems cannot be completely eliminated. Some improvement could be made by increasing the conscientiousness of employees and by adding personnel and transportation routes. However, such additions of employees and routes are not economically feasible. They believed that delivery performance could probably never get much better than 98 percent.

Local officials feel they have been doing the best job possible within budget limitations. They added that the staff-hour budget for fiscal year 1977 is about 9.6 percent (1 million staff hours valued at about \$9 million) below fiscal year 1976 actual usage. They said this reduction is bound to hurt delivery performance in southeastern Wisconsin.

CHAPTER 4

CHANGES IN PROCESSING AND DISTRIBUTION

AT MILWAUKEE AND MADISON SCFS

The Postal Service has recently made or is planning to make certain changes in the distribution and processing of mail in southeastern Wisconsin. They involve

- realigning mail sorting functions of SCFs, increasing the Milwaukee SCF's daily volume by about 270,000 pieces;
- transferring some parcel post operations from the Milwaukee SCF to the bulk mail facility at Chicago;
- bringing most of the first-class local post offices under the area mail processing concept;
- relocating the Madison SCF to a new larger facility in July 1976; and
- installing two letter sorting machines in the Madison SCF which will become operational in January 1977.

These changes may offer economies but are unlikely to improve the area's mail service.

DISTRIBUTION PATTERNS

In March 1976, the Milwaukee SCF's mail sorting functions were realigned. This change essentially involved redesignating the locations for which an SCF would sort mail. The primary effect of this change is to decrease the workload in most SCFs--generally manual facilities--but increase it for the more mechanized State distribution centers. At the Milwaukee SCF--Wisconsin's state distribution center--daily volume has been increased by about 270,000 pieces.

Why was such a change made? According to postal officials, it was to lessen the workload in most SCFs, many of which were manual operations. This lessened workload is to permit most SCFs to be more effective.

How will this change effect service? Most patrons will receive their mail in the same manner and as quickly as before. However, this change may decrease the likelihood

of mail destined for a 2-day delivery area arriving in 1 day. To illustrate, a letter going from Springfield, Illinois, to Madison, Wisconsin, is in the Postal Service's 2-day delivery area. Under the old procedure, the Springfield SCF would sort to the Madison SCF and route the letter directly, and it was often delivered in 1 day. Under the new procedure, the letter will be routed from Springfield to Milwaukee for processing and then to Madison. Under this procedure, it would be virtually impossible for such a letter to arrive in 1 day.

PARCEL POST OPERATIONS

On June 7, 1976, the Milwaukee SCF parcel post operations were incorporated in the bulk mail system. (See GAO report B-114874, Nov. 1, 1974, for a discussion of this system.) Under this change, a number of parcels now processed by the Milwaukee SCF will be handled by the bulk mail facility in Chicago. However, the Milwaukee SCF will still process parcels:

- Originating in the Milwaukee SCF area and destined for delivery in the Milwaukee, Madison, Portage, Green Bay, and Oshkosh SCF areas.
- Such as film canisters and parcels over 25 pounds, which cannot be processed through the bulk mail center.

The Postal Service expects the automated bulk mail centers to provide quicker, more consistent, and damage-free parcel delivery.

AREA MAIL PROCESSING

The Service intends by October 1976 to put all but three (Racine, Kenosha, and Waukesha) first-class post offices in southeastern Wisconsin under the area mail processing concept. Currently, offices not under that concept cancel all locally deposited mail and partially distribute it. Under area mail processing, most canceling and distribution operations will be moved to the Milwaukee SCF. According to Postal officials, this change will achieve more efficient processing through better use of existing facilities and distribution procedures at the SCF. They also project that 92 fewer staff-hours will be needed daily within the SCF area.

The effect of this change will be to shift some workloads from local post offices to the SCF. Postal officials foresee no deterioration in delivery service.

NEW MADISON FACILITY

The Madison mail processing operations moved into a new, larger building during July 1976. The new facility has more space, especially in the dock area. In addition, the labor

expenses involved in moving mail processing equipment to aid in distribution will be eliminated.

INSTALLATION OF LETTER SORTING MACHINES

In November 1976, two letter sorting machines will be installed at the Madison SCF. These machines are expected to be fully operational by 1977. The office then plans to include more of its associate offices in the area mail processing program.

CHAPTER 5

SCOPE OF REVIEW

Our work included a review of service policies and procedures followed by the central region, the Milwaukee district and the Madison and Milwaukee sectional centers, and various post offices; observation of processing and delivery operations; discussion of problems with officials at the sectional centers and selected post offices; and a review of complaint files. Our review concentrated on the area served by the Milwaukee SCF, since it is by far the largest mail processing facility in Wisconsin and serves almost all of Congressman Aspin's district.

LES ASPIN
1st District, Wisconsin

HOME OFFICE
603 FILLMORE ST.
MADISON, WISCONSIN 53706
414-632-8184
218 DODGE STREET
JANESVILLE, WISCONSIN 53523
608-752-8024

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

B-114874

March 31, 1976

Elmer B. Staats
Comptroller General of the United States
441 G Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Staats:

I am writing to you today to request a GAO review of the quality of mail service in Wisconsin.

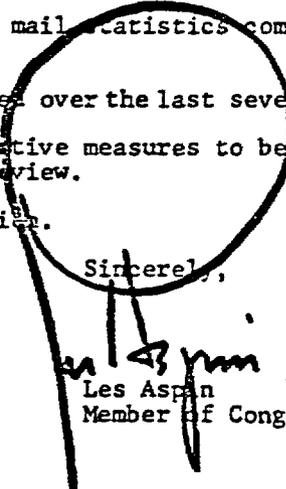
Specifically, I would like to know:

- 1) Does first-class mail delivery performance for Wisconsin meet the Postal Service's goal of 95% on-time delivery? How does the performance compare with the Midwest region and the nation as a whole?
- 2) What are the performance rates for delivery of mail from 2- and 3-day areas, and how do these rates compare with regional and national performance?
- 3) How do missent mail statistics for Wisconsin compare with regional and national figures?
- 4) How do delivery of damaged mail statistics compare with the region and the nation?
- 5) How has performance changed over the last several years?

If you have found other comparative measures to be valuable, please include them in your review.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,


Les Aspin
Member of Congress

LA:klb

GAO note: In accordance with agreements reached with Congressman Aspin's office, the scope of this review was limited to the counties of south-eastern Wisconsin.

WISCONSIN COUNTIES AND POST OFFICES INCLUDED IN THE
MILWAUKEE AND MADISON SECTIONAL CENTER AREAS

Wisconsin Counties Included in the
Milwaukee Sectional Center Area

Calumet	Ozaukee
Dodge	Racine
Fond Du Lac	Sheboygan
Jefferson	Walworth
Kenosha	Washington
Milwaukee	Waukesha
Manitowoc	

Wisconsin Post Offices Included in the
Milwaukee Sectional Center Area

Astell	Eagle
Allenton	East Troy
Ashippun	Eden
Bassett	Elkhart Lake
Belgium	Elkhorn
Big Bend	Elm Grove
Bristol	Fontana
Brookfield	Franksville
Brownsville	Fredonia
Burlington	Genesee Depot
Butler	Genoa City
Caledonia	Germantown
Campbellsport	Glenbeulah
Camp Lake	Grafton
Cascade	Greenbush
Cedarburg	Greendale
Cedar Grove	Hales Corners
Chilton	Hartford
Cleveland	Hartland
Clyman	Haven
Colgate	Helenville
Cudahy	Fingham
Darien	Honey Creek
Delafield	Horicon
Delavan	Huberius
Dousman	Hustiford

Iron Ridge
Ixonia
Jackson
Johnson Creek
Juneau
Kansasville
Kenosha
Kewaskum
Kiel
Knowles
Kohler
Lake Geneva
Lannon
Lebanon
Lomira
Lyons
Malone
Mayville
Menomonee Falls
Merton
Milwaukee
Mount Calvary
Mukwonago
Muskego
Nashoiah
Neosho
Newburg
New Holstein
New Munster
Newton
North Lake
North Prairie
Oak Creek
Oakfield
Oconomowoc
Okauchee
Oostburg
Palmyra
Pell Lake
Pewaukee
Pleasant Prairie
Plymouth
Port Washington
Powers Lake

Racine
Random Lake
Richfield
Rochester
Rockfield
Rubicon
Saint Cloud
Salem
Saukville
Sheboygan
Sheboygan Falls
Silver Lake
Slinger
Somers
South Byron
South Milwaukee
Springfield
Stockbridge
Sturtevant
Sullivan
Sussex
Taycheedah
Thiensville
Trevor
Troy Center
Twin Lakes
Union Grove
Waldo
Wales
Walworth
Waterford
Watertown
Waukesha
West Bend
Whitewater
Williams Bay
Wilmot
Wood
Woodland
Woodworth
Zenda

Wisconsin Counties Included in the
Madison Sectional Center Area

Columbia	Jefferson
Crawford	Lafayette
Dane	Richland
Dodge	Rock
Grant	Sauk
Green	Walworth
Iowa	

Local Wisconsin Post Offices Included in the
Madison Sectional Center Area

Afton	Cobb
Albany	Cottage Grove
Arena	Cross Plains
Argyle	Cuba City
Avalon	Dane
Avoca	Darlington
Bagley	Deerfield
Barneveld	DeForest
Beetown	Dickeyville
Belleville	Dodgeville
Belmont	Edgerton
Beloit	Edmund
Benton	Evansville
Black Earth	Fennimore
Blanchardville	Footville
Bloomington	Ft. Atkinson
Blue Mounds	Glen Haven
Blue River	Gotham
Boscobel	Gratiot
Brodhead	Hanover
Brooklyn	Hazel Green
Browntown	Highland
Cambridge	Hollandale
Cassville	Janesville
Clinton	Jefferson

APPENDIX II

Juda
Kieler
Lake Mills
Lancaster
Linden
Livingston
Lodi
Lone Rock
Lowell
Marshall
Mazomanie
McFarland
Merrimac
Milton
Mineral Point
Monroe
Montfort
Monticello
Morrisonville
Mount Hope
Mount Horeb
Muscodá
New Glarus
Oregon
Orfordville

APPENDIX II

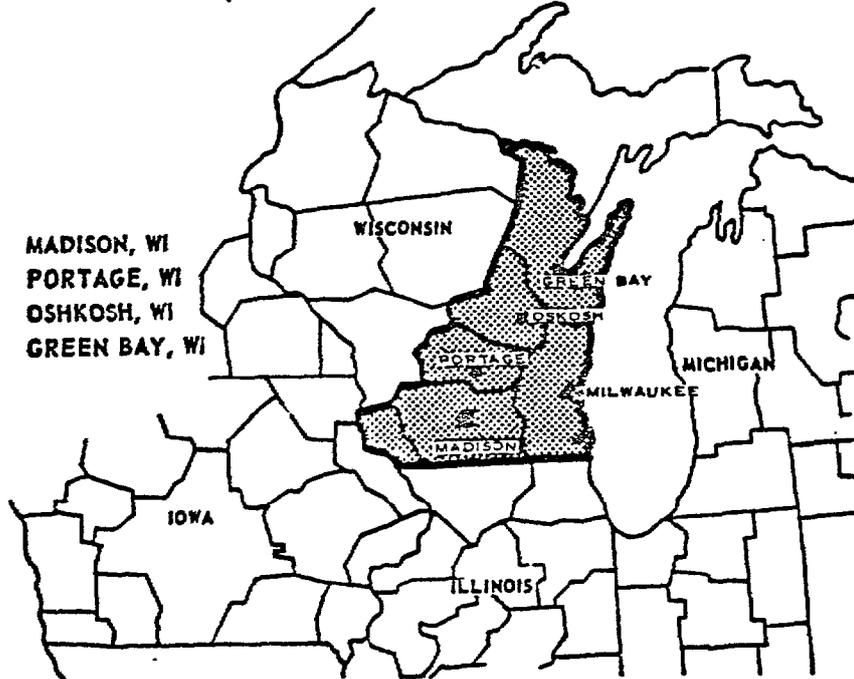
Patch Grove
Plain
Platteville
Potosi
Prairie du Chien
Prairie du Sac
Reeseville
Rewey
Richland Center
Ridgeway
Sauk City
Sextonville
Sharon
Shullsburg
Sinsiniwa
South Wayne
Spring Green
Stitzer
Stoughton
Sun Prairie
Tiffany
Waterloo
Waunakee
Wauzeka
Windsor
Woodford
Woodman

**OVERNIGHT SECTIONAL CENTER FACILITIES
SERVED BY MILWAUKEE SECTIONAL CENTER FACILITY**

DESTINATION:

MILWAUKEE

**MADISON, WI
PORTAGE, WI
OSHKOSH, WI
GREEN BAY, WI**

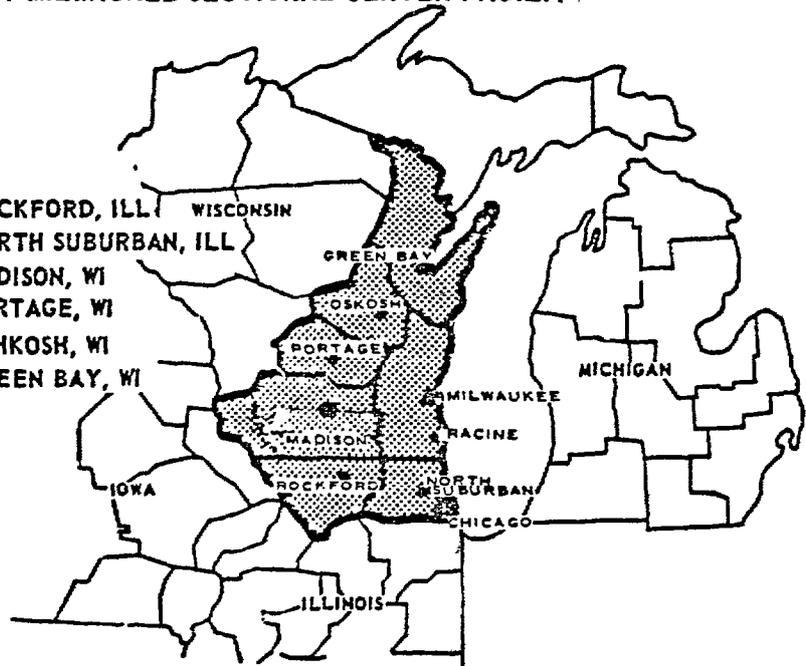


**OVERNIGHT SECTIONAL CENTER FACILITIES
SERVED BY MILWAUKEE SECTIONAL CENTER FACILITY**

ORIGINATING:

MILWAUKEE

**ROCKFORD, ILL
NORTH SUBURBAN, ILL
MADISON, WI
PORTAGE, WI
OSHKOSH, WI
GREEN BAY, WI**

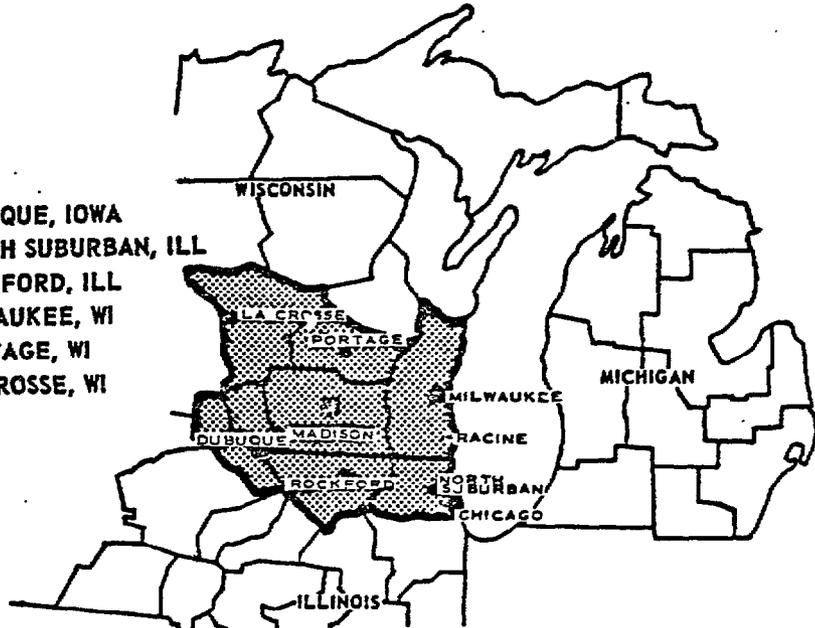


OVERNIGHT SECTIONAL CENTER FACILITIES
SERVED BY MADISON SECTIONAL CENTER FACILITY

DESTINATION:

MADISON

DUBUQUE, IOWA
NORTH SUBURBAN, ILL
ROCKFORD, ILL
MILWAUKEE, WI
PORTAGE, WI
LA CROSSE, WI

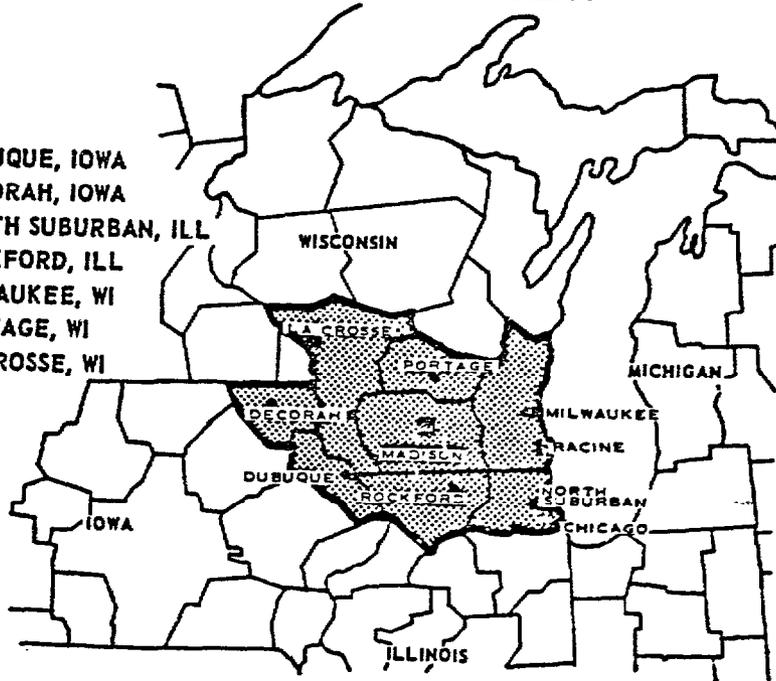


OVERNIGHT SECTIONAL CENTER FACILITIES
SERVED BY MADISON SECTIONAL CENTER FACILITY

ORIGINATING:

MADISON

DUBUQUE, IOWA
DECORAH, IOWA
NORTH SUBURBAN, ILL
ROCKFORD, ILL
MILWAUKEE, WI
PORTAGE, WI
LA CROSSE, WI



DELIVERY AREAS UPGRADED UNDERSERVICE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMMilwaukee Sectional CenterOvernight Cities

Akron, Ohio	Kansas City, Missouri
Cincinnati, Ohio	Louisville, Kentucky
Cleveland, Ohio	Minneapolis, Minnesota
Columbus, Ohio	Omaha, Nebraska
Des Moines, Iowa	St. Louis, Missouri
Detroit, Michigan	St. Paul, Minnesota
Grand Rapids, Michigan	Toledo, Ohio
Indianapolis, Indiana	Wichita, Kansas

States Upgraded from 3-day to 2-day Service

Arizona	New Jersey
California	New Mexico
Colorado	New York
Connecticut	Oklahoma
Georgia	Pennsylvania
Louisiana	Texas (Central Section only)
Nevada	Utah

Madison Sectional CenterOvernight Cities

Chicago, Illinois	Kansas City, Missouri
Cleveland, Ohio	Louisville, Kentucky
Columbus, Ohio	Minneapolis, Minnesota
Des Moines, Iowa	Omaha, Nebraska
Detroit, Michigan	St. Paul, Minnesota
Indianapolis, Indiana	Wichita, Kansas

States Upgraded from 3-day to 2-day Service

Alabama	New Jersey
Arizona	New Mexico
Arkansas	New York
California	Oklahoma
Colorado	Oregon
Connecticut	Pennsylvania
Georgia	Texas
Louisiana	Utah
Maryland	West Virginia
Massachusetts	