



WAKE UP!

President/ Editor
Dave Barbuzzi

Publisher

Volume 44 Issue 12

December 2020

Acton , Amesbury , Andover , Bedford , Beverly, Billerica , Burlington , Chelmsford , Concord , Danvers, Dracut , Gloucester, Haverhill, Holliston, Ipswich, Lowell, Lynnfield, Manchester, Marblehead, Maynard, Merrimac, Newburyport, North Chelmsford, North Reading , Peabody, Reading, Rockport, Salem , South Hamilton, Sudbury , Tewksbury , Topsfield, Wakefield , Wayland , Wilmington , Winchester

USPS Close Contact Tracing Program

COVID 19- Close Contact Guidance

Definition (Updated October 2020):

Guidelines from the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention define "close contact" as anyone who was within 6 feet of an infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period* starting from 2 days before illness onset (or, for asymptomatic patients, 2 days prior to test specimen collection) until the time the patient is isolated.

** Individual exposures added together over a 24-hour period (e.g., three 5-minute exposures for a total of 15 minutes). Data are limited, making it difficult to precisely define "close contact;" however, 15 cumulative minutes of exposure at a distance of 6 feet or less can be used as an operational definition for contact investigation. Factors to consider when defining close contact include proximity (closer distance likely increases exposure risk), the duration of exposure (longer exposure time likely increases exposure risk), whether the infected individual has symptoms (the period around onset of symptoms is associated with the highest levels of viral shedding), if the infected person was likely to generate respiratory aerosols (e.g., was coughing, singing, shouting), and other environmental factors (crowding, adequacy of ventilation, whether exposure was indoors or outdoors). Because the general public has not received training on proper selection and use of respiratory PPE, such as an N95, the determination of close contact should generally be made irrespective of whether the contact was wearing respiratory PPE. At this time, differential determination of close contact for those using fabric face coverings is not recommended.*

Responsibility:

<p>Employee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notify immediate supervisor of positive finding of COVID-19. Provide medical documentation from treating physician or public health official to OHNA. 	<p>District HR Manager:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign close contact investigation to either OHNA or Safety. Notify Area HR Manager of close contact investigation being opened and assigned.
<p>Installation Head / Supervisor / Manager:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pull together a timeline of potential close contact days, times, and locations. Provide names of potential close contact employees based on potential exposure. Contact District HR. 	<p>Area HR Manager:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor progress of close contact investigation. Update HQ Occupational Health of status through closeout.

President's Message

“Are We There Yet?”

If you are a parent, and your children are old enough to speak, you undoubtedly have heard these words uttered from the back seat of your car. Often times, they are spoken not long after leaving your driveway. That is how many of us feel about the year 2020 coming to an end. Are we there yet?

I'm not going to rehash the entire year. I would, however, like to share something that I recently read on the UC Davis Health Newsroom website. I have reprinted an excerpt below:

Abnormal is the new normal

But that doesn't mean we don't have paths to help ourselves and others. It starts with understanding why so many people feel frazzled. Knowing why we feel that everything is abnormal can help us feel normal.

“We know there are two kinds of stress that have long-term effects on our mental well-being and physical health – intense stress and prolonged stress,” Hermanson said. “We have both.”

Add to that the uncertainty about, well, almost everything.

“We have unknowns in every part of our lives,” she said. “At the same time, a lot of the things we generally do to cope, the things we enjoy and that give life meaning, have changed or been put off limits.”

I am writing this article on November 19th, one short week before Thanksgiving. I can only imagine how many people are stressing right now, especially at the postal service. We have seen a prolonged surge in COVID-19 cases leading into the holidays. We want to spend time with our families during the holidays. This set of circumstances causes both intense stress and prolonged stress.

Letter carriers are also stressing about peak season. Although parcels in general have declined recently, they will certainly increase in the coming month or so. Couple that with the poor staffing in many offices and you have a recipe for fatigue and depression. This month's EAP insert in the Wake-Up! talks about suicide awareness and prevention. Some of you reading this may not be comfortable speaking with others about even mundane things let alone suicide. But, you might be in the right place at the right time to recognize something is amiss. If you do, please, summon the courage to have a conversation to let whomever it may know that you are there for them. Sometimes, that's all it takes. And, if you are the one feeling hopeless, realize that there are resources available to you and take advantage of them.

There seems to still be confusion in the branch as to what happens when someone in your office comes into contact with or tests positive for Covid-19. I have published the close contact tracing protocol on the cover of this month's Wake-Up! so everyone can read it on their own, outside of the chaos and stress or work, and understand it. Hopefully, knowing what is happening will set some minds at ease moving forward. Of course, there have been cases of employees contracting covid from co-workers, but the overwhelming majority of infections are the result of contact with family members and friends.

We do need to remain vigilant, even more vigilant moving forward. Wearing masks, washing hands before touching one's face, drinking frequently (every 15 minutes or so), wiping down frequently touched objects or areas, social distancing are all ways that we can protect ourselves and those around us. Keep doing that and you will most likely remain safe. Hopefully, the two vaccines that have been announced are distributed en masse and efficiently. I've read that by NEXT Christmas, things may get back to normal.

Speaking of Christmas, this Christmas, as I mentioned earlier peak season is ramping up. I have received several calls at the Union office regarding parcels with USPS labels being delivered by other carriers such as FedEx and UPS. As I have stated before, the only thing we can do is educate the customers about this practice and be sure they know it is not us mishandling their packages or leaving them in unsafe locations. If the parcels are delivered into a mail receptacle without postage, the proper procedure is to remove the parcel and bring it back to your office and present it to your supervisor. There is a liaison between the postal service and Amazon that is responsible for communicating with representatives of Amazon to rectify these situations.

I would also like to mention proper delivery of circulars to apartments or condos with cluster boxes. All mail is to be delivered INSIDE THE BOX. Nothing should be left on shelves or couch boxes for the customer to have “self-service”. This all too often leads to something bad. If you are not allowed to deliver properly, immediately contact the Union office and we will get the situation corrected.

I want to wish everyone health, happiness, rest, and comfort in the coming weeks. I have to think that we are “almost there” and that soon we can breath a 2021 sigh of relief.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!!

Stay informed!

Dave Barbuzzi

Executive Vice-President's Report

The Presidential elections are finally over, although there is currently a recount underway in Georgia, but it still looks like there will be a change in the White House. Whether or not that changes things in regard to the Postal Service remains to be seen, but it appears that the NALC and the Postal Service will both have more of a voice in the new White House than they did previously. At least after the inauguration, the new administration will probably listen to our real issues and hopefully it will be easier to secure more funding to cover the debts incurred because of the loss of revenue due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It will be an interesting couple of months, dependent on the results of our national agreement arbitration decision, and the new Congress to see if any real Postal Reform happens.

Open Season for Health Benefits is underway until December 12th and most of the changes you choose can be done on the Liteblue website. This is actually the easiest way to change or add to your benefits. There is also a way to compare multiple plans at a time on this site. Make sure you have your passwords and employee numbers available. If you don't have a password, there is still time to get one through PostalEase. Even if you are not making any changes to your Health Plans at this time, it is a good idea to have a password to conduct any future changes to your Thrift Savings Plan, payroll deductions etc. If you don't have access to a computer you can process changes through the PostalEase phone line, but Liteblue is the easiest way. The NALC Health Plan Brochure is available on the NALC.org website. All the rates for next year are there also. The Health Plan will be offering virtual learning sessions that you can register for on the nalchbp.org website, the website for the health plan. This is a good way to learn more about the plan.

I'm sure everyone has heard more than they want to about the Covid infection rates, but the numbers are really climbing for positive tests and hospitalization rates. The state of Massachusetts had done a pretty good job of minimizing the virus after a very rough start in the Spring, but the numbers have been increasing at a very high rate recently and the state will again be opening up field hospitals to deal with Covid patients if necessary. The CDC says that thousands of lives can be saved if everyone wears a mask in public. A lot of sacrifices have been made. Hopefully, it won't be more than a couple of months before a vaccine begins to be distributed as at least 2 vaccine trials are just about ready to file for FDA approval. I hope we can all take the advice of the CDC and minimize the socialization, other than our own families, and wear masks for a few more months until a vaccine can be administered. It is not worth the risk of getting ill or infecting someone else. The long-term effects of this virus have yet to be seen.

This year has been a struggle to be a letter carrier for many reasons. The natural staffing issues in this area remain, but in some stations are starting to get better. The Covid-19 issues have forced many carriers to take time off to care for their children because of closed schools and daycares. Many carriers have been forced to quarantine because of their own illness or the contact tracing showed they may have been exposed by someone else. Many carriers have retired this year as the workforce has a large percentage of retirement eligible carriers, and this will continue. All of this has brought about the forcing of many carriers to work hours they never expected or wanted. Now we are heading into the Christmas season and will probably be hit with a heavy volume of parcels. A silver lining to it all is that we are all still fully employed, something millions of Americans can't say right now. Hopefully, we will soon be rewarded with a new national agreement and some meaningful Postal Reform. This may even result in the retention of more employees to alleviate staffing issues. I wish everyone a great Thanksgiving and Christmas season.

Keep your head up!
Paul Desmond

Calendar of Events

December 1	Branch Zoom Meeting
December 7	Pearl Harbor Day
December 10	Hanukkah Begins
December 14	Open Season Ends
December 18	Hanukkah Ends
December 21	Winter Solstice
December 23	Festivus (For the rest of us)
December 25	Christmas Day
December 26	Kwanzaa Begins
December 28	Boxing Day
December 31	New Years' Eve

Branch 25 Directory of Officers

David J. Barbuzzi	President
Paul G. Desmond	Executive V.P.
Dan Wheeler	Vice President
Andy Coan	Secretary
James P. Nutter	Treasurer
Kenneth Dusombre	Health Benefits Rep.
Jim Salvati	Safety Officer
Jack Lyman	Sergeant At Arms
Ron Noviello	Chmn. Board of Trustees
Dan Raske	Trustee
Bruce Johnson	Trustee
John McNulty	Trustee
Anthony Bossi	Assistant Secretary
Peter Godino	Assistant Treasurer
Bob Cronin	MBA-NSBA Rep
Steve Pickett	Assistant Safety Officer
Richard Donlon	Asst Health Benefits Rep
Ron Noviello	Workers' Comp Rep.

Your "Wake-Up!" is produced in-house at the Branch 25 Union office each and every month.

V.P. REPORT

This month's issue of *The Wake Up* is the last issue of 2020. It has been quite a year for us letter carriers. There has been no shortage of issues: the pandemic, financial struggles, continued negotiations for a new contract, a new Postmaster General and Vote by Mail added to the everyday struggles we face. As I sit down to write this Joe Biden has just passed the threshold of electoral college votes to become the President-elect. President Trump has already said he is not conceding the results and there will be legal challenges going forward. Whether the senate will be under democrat or republican control remains to be seen. It looks like we will have to wait for two run-off elections in the state of Georgia in January. We will see where that will take us, but hopefully Biden's victory is a good thing for the Postal Service. We will have to wait and see how all that plays out going forward. I wanted to mention a few things that apply to letter carriers around the holiday season.

The first two are overtime provisions covered in Article 8 of the National Agreement. During the month of December there is a penalty overtime exclusion. This year's penalty exclusion period starts with pay period 25-2 on November 28 and ends with pay period 1-21 on December 25. There is no overtime paid at the penalty rate. All overtime worked between these dates is paid at the regular overtime rate of time and a half. The other Article 8 provision for the month of December is the temporary lifting of the 12 hour per day and 60 hour per week work limits.

Letter carriers filling out PS Form 3996 routinely get push-back on management as to why they need the requested time and how much time they need to complete their route on any given day. For the month of December one of those struggles can be made easier. Line J of the 3996 is *Reason for Use of Auxiliary*. If you look at the instructions on the reverse of the form under Line J you will see that it says you may omit reason during the Christmas period. This does not release you from letting management know how long it will take you to deliver your route. You are still obligated to give your best estimate as to what time you will need but at least for the month of December you do not need to say why. The fact that it is the Christmas season is enough.

The 2016-2019 National Agreement provided paid holidays to CCAs for the first time. Christmas is one of the 6 paid holidays. CCAs are paid either 8,6 or 4 hours based on the size of their office. CCAs on their 5-day break do not qualify for the paid holiday. For those regular carriers who may be working on Christmas Day itself Article 11.4 explains Christmas is different from other holidays in that carriers are paid at the time and a half rate plus the holiday pay instead of the normal straight time rate plus holiday pay on the other holidays. With all these contractual provisions the maxim "If you don't know your rights, you don't have any rights" holds true. If you have questions on any of these issues, please ask your steward or give the branch office a call.

With the pandemic still dragging on that means the continuation of virtual branch meetings instead of the regular in-person meetings we have taken for granted in the past. The December branch meeting is always one of the best attended and it will be odd not to have it this year. I wish all the members of Branch 25 a safe holiday season and here's to hoping we turn the corner in many ways as we head in to 2021.

In solidarity,

Dan Wheeler

 **BRANCH 25 RETIREE GRATUITY VOUCHER**

Name: _____
(as it will appear on plaque)

P.O. Retiring from: _____

Phone number: _____

Retirement date: _____

Please note: Retiree must be a member in good standing at date of retirement. Retiree has 4 months from retirement date to remit this voucher to the branch office. Please mail to: NALC Branch 25
2500 Main St, Suite 201, Tewksbury Ma, 01876



December will soon be upon us, and, like all postal employees letter carriers are also affected by the beginning of this month, by far the busiest mailing season in the postal year. So, your safety team extends our grateful thanks to you all, in advance, for working safely throughout your exhausting schedules, which can sometimes be daily from 6am to 6pm. We commend you and encourage all members to continue working safely by faithfully wearing your facemasks, practicing social distancing strictly, wash your hands and always wipe down your postal equipment routinely, especially your vehicles parts that you frequently touch.

And now, I will present my 2020 version of some yuletide safety advice...Around the holiday season, on every route in this vast Branch 25 region, a lot of people decorate their yards or businesses with Christmas trees, wreaths, and bright blinking lights. Yes, we will soon be greeted by angels appearing alongside snowmen, nutcracker like toy soldiers, polar bears, reindeer and even smiling jolly old Santa Claus himself!

On our routes within the next few weeks, some of us Christmas-card-deliverers will encounter neat red and white rows of illuminated candy canes that will brightly line the walkways, as sparkling lights and shiny tinsel will decorate the trees. In recent years, inflatable holiday figures have become very popular and I am sure that you will run into one on your route sooner or later. Please, brothers and sisters, pay attention and strive to consistently drive and walk safely. Don't allow yourself to get distracted by these new action-packed decorations.

So NOW, hear-ye, hear-me!! I don't wish to sound like sour-spirited scrooge, but baugh humbug! Some Christmas decorations can be a safety hazard to letter carriers.

From a single wreath hung on a door that covers the address or mail slot, to the Christmas lights wrapped around the handrails that we are supposed to hold onto while using the stairs. Yes, I'm sorry but certain holiday decorations can be put up in hazardous locations for us mailbaggers!! So beware.

Although these colorful holiday decorations are cheery and add to the festive moods of passers--by like us, please don't get caught up admiring them too much! Now listen up closely please, this is important. Our safety advice to you is: Do not get tunnel vision on the holiday decorations that you are approaching until you locate a power source and or an extension cord which lights up or inflates these decorations. Christmas lights and extension cords will trip you up, if you don't find them first!! So please, try to locate these cords so that you don't end up doing the electric cord slide!! These decorations also have tie-down chords which are taught and anchored to the ground. Most of these chords are black. Please be on the lookout for these tripping hazards...especially after dark!

The other night, while I was delivering in the dark, my focus was on the ground because of these chords, and I almost got clothes-line strangled by a string of lights draped between two trees I walk by daily at that address. They had not been turned on yet, so I didn't even notice them until I was on top of them. My headlamp caused a reflection in the unlit bulbs. A few houses later, I was temporarily blinded by a motion sensitive laser light display. Please be aware of these hazards. Your safety team wish you a safe and merry Christmas along with a safe and Happy New Year!

Stevie Pickett, Assistant Safety Officer

Just For The Health Of It

My wife bought a new car recently. We followed our usual practice - she got her new car, I got her hand-me-down. It's sort of when my daughters were in college. They'd go off on their exotic vacations during spring break - I'd get a t-shirt. What's that got to do with the price of tomatoes you may be wondering. Well, it's a bit of a stretch but there's a point to be made here. We got top dollar for our thirteen-year-old trade-in because we're firm believers in preventive maintenance - take care of your car and it will take care of you.

Now to the point. That same premise can be applied to your health - take care of your body and it will take care of you. As I write this article, FEHB Open Season is rapidly approaching (November 9th to December 14th).

As it so happens, the NALC Health Benefit Plan, in addition to its regular Dare-to-Compare benefits, offers excellent Preventive Care Benefits - far too numerous to be included here. It's important to note that all three plans offered by the NALC - High Option, Value Option and Consumer Driven offer extensive Preventive Care Benefits. Refer to the Plan Brochure for detailed information.

Another valuable tool for promoting your health is the Health Assessment offered by our plan. It's a win-win for members - incentives and extremely helpful information. Next month's article will feature the Health Assessment.

At the time of my writing this article it has become readily apparent that come January 20, 2021 we are going to have a new President of the United States. Based on the campaign rhetoric, the new President will face the COVID-19 pandemic head-on rather than look the other way as the sitting President has done. In the meantime, you heroes out there on your mail routes, keep following the safety protocols.

Keep on truckin'
Rich Donlon



MASSACHUSETTS AFL-CIO ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIP *Frequently Asked Questions*

What is the application process?

Interested applicants can register for the exam by visiting www.massafclcio.org/scholarships.

- The application process will open in **October 2020** and the deadline to apply is **Friday, December 18th, 2020**. Once a student applies, it is their responsibility to notify their high school guidance office that they plan to take the exam.
- The 2021 study guide and new interactive study website will be available **12/1/20**.
- The exam will be administered between **Monday, January 25, 2021 and Friday, February 5, 2021** at high schools across Massachusetts.

How are the winners selected?

All Massachusetts AFL-CIO scholarships and local union/central labor council scholarships listed in Section 1 of the scholarship brochure are awarded solely on the basis of the multiple-choice exam and essay score. Awardees are selected by the MA AFL-CIO Scholarship Committee, a group of current and retired union members, which reviews and scores the essay question and multiple choice questions. The highest scoring students receive awards. Students sponsored by a local union are eligible to receive no more than 2 scholarships.

Who is eligible?

Every year the Massachusetts AFL-CIO publishes a scholarship brochure describing the eligibility criteria for each award. Students with a union affiliation are eligible for both the Massachusetts AFL-CIO awards and those awards listed under their specific local union/central labor council. Massachusetts students that do not have union affiliation are still eligible for the Massachusetts AFL-CIO scholarships. Students from other states are only eligible for scholarships offered by their affiliated local union that meet the union's criteria. If you are unsure as to the specific criteria of your affiliated local union, see the Scholarship Book for more information.

Who gives scholarships?

The Massachusetts AFL-CIO, along with our affiliated local unions and labor/non-labor organizations, offer a scholarship program providing hundreds of scholarships totaling almost one million dollars to union members, their children/step children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, as well as to any Massachusetts high school senior. Please note that for union scholarships, each scholarship that is offered has its own criteria set by the donor. Students must meet the criteria in order to be eligible for that scholarship.

There is a sample Scholarship Book on our website where you can see the different scholarships that are offered by the Massachusetts AFL-CIO, as well as other local unions and organizations and the amount and criteria for each scholarship set forth by the local union.

For more information, contact
Carla Connolly, Massachusetts AFL-CIO Scholarship Coordinator
(781) 324-8230 or cconnolly@massafclcio.org



KNOW THE RIGHT WORDS

This is a serious conversation. It may take awhile, so initiate it when you have enough time to spend. Find a private place where you can speak with the person, without distraction.

After initiating a conversation, **LISTEN**.

Every conversation is different, so be prepared for what may occur. The person may not want to talk, and you can reassure them that you care and are ready to listen anytime they feel like talking. Or, the person may open up and share some very painful feelings. **Don't try to talk them out of how they are feeling.** It's okay to ask questions.

Make sure they are **SAFE** for now.

Talk about suicide resources such as counseling or a crisis hotline and offer to search for phone numbers. If the person has a plan to harm themselves, **it's important not to leave them alone.** Ask if you can call a family member, their counselor or emergency services while you remain with them. Continue to provide reassurance and support.

YOUR EAP IS HERE FOR YOU: 800-EAP-4YOU (800-327-4968) | TTY: 877-492-7341



CALL US TODAY: 800-327-4968
800-EAP-4YOU | TTY: 877-492-7341
WWW.EAP4YOU.COM

WAKE UP

2500 Main Street
Suite # 201
Tewksbury, MA 01876
Phone: (978) 658-5820
Fax: (978) 658-0888
Web: www.nalcbranch25.com

First Class Mail
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 409
TEWKSBURY, MA



at the next meeting
December 1
via
ZOOM Meeting

December Branch Zoom Meeting

Dec 1, 2020 08:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82405880948>

Meeting ID: **824 0588 0948**

One tap mobile

+13126266799,,82405880948# US (Chicago)

+19292056099,,82405880948# US (New York)

Dial by your location

+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

+1 929 205 6099 US (New York)

+1 301 715 8592 US (Washington D.C)

+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)

+1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)

+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

Meeting ID: 824 0588 0948

Find your local number: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82405880948>