

The Hazards of Door to Door Mail Delivery

Bob Test, Safety Captain at
Beechwold Station

Everyday each mail carrier confronts and avoids numerous hazards. Just being where you are puts you at certain risks—an airplane or meteor could fall through the roof or a car could crash through the wall at any second.

A hazard is any potential source of danger—any object or any event that might cause an injury to you. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to calculate how many hazards we face each day as we deliver the mail. But consider this.

At each house we face many hazards: (1) dogs and other animals; (2) steps—each step in fact is a source of danger; (3) rusty mailboxes with sharp edges; (4) toys, tools, extension cords or hoses in the grass; (5) dog piles – they're slippery; (6) landscaping hazards – railroad timbers, wires strung between posts, terraced lawns; (7) driveways; (8) overhanging tree branches; (9) potted plants, hanging plants, and other decorative items; (10) holes, ditches, and uneven lawns.

And of course this list doesn't include icy patches on steps, driveways, or in the yard. A yard could have dozens of such hazards. Or even more dangerous—there might be only one nearly invisible patch of ice on your route squarely in your path. If a porch doesn't have a hazardous hanging plant today there might be one there tomorrow and you better be looking for it. No ball lying in the yard today? No dog waiting in the bushes? Better watch out for them. They might be there tomorrow.

Let's do some calculating. Say there are 10 hazards per delivery and that you have 400 deliveries per day. That makes 4,000 hazards per day. Multiply that by 5 days a week and 47 weeks per year, that yields 940,000 hazards per year—almost a million.

We know the risks are high. A fall could effect you the rest of your life. Every carrier takes measures to avoid injuries from these hazards. We avoid thumbing the mail as we cross driveways and as we walk up steps, we take a good look at the yard before we start across and we glance up frequently to recheck the safety of the path we're taking. We avoid unsafe shortcuts, we avoid

haste, and we use hazard cards to remind ourselves of any unusual or particularly dangerous hazards.

Most hazards are avoidable—and in fact we do avoid them. But some, such as a pit bull on the loose or that lone patch of invisible ice are not. We can take reasonable precautions to avoid the usual hazards. But given that we are fallible human beings and, more importantly, given that management pushes us, and sometimes pushes us hard, to deliver more mail in less time than an appropriate level of concern for safety allows, accidents are inevitable. You might be extra careful in watching out for hazards but there is no guarantee that you will see everyone of them.

Given these facts, it is simply not rational that management should expect us to avoid every one of the millions of hazards we will face over a career as a mail carrier. The probability is high that you will suffer more than one injury due to slip and a fall during the course of your postal career.

After twenty years as a mail carrier, I have concluded that management is oblivious to the job that we do. Some never carried mail. The rest have forgotten. That is,

in part, why we may get, should they find them stuck in the back of a drawer and if they have the time to pass them out--a safety pin for safe driving. But don't expect recognition for safe walking.

Management is difficult. If it were easy there would be fewer tinhorn supervisors. Most have little interest either in the actual work involved in mail delivery or in the safety of the carriers that deliver the mail. Their main interest is in the numbers that go into their reports. Until managers and supervisors are required to carry the mail on eight hour routes on a regular once a quarter or so they will remain unaware of the hazards we face and of the work involved in the safe delivery of the mail. Please take the time to take care.