

# Your assignment— Your workload estimation



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**O**n a daily basis, nearly every letter carrier must go through the process of evaluating the workload of their assigned duties and estimate the time associated with completing those duties. When a letter carrier believes that the route they were assigned to carry has more work than they can complete within eight hours, or they believe they cannot complete all of the work assigned to them for the day within their scheduled time, the letter carrier is responsible for notifying management. Likewise, management is required to inform the letter carrier of what to do. Many times, the resulting evaluations culminate in disagreements.

Contractually enforceable provisions addressed in Handbook M-39, *Management of Delivery Services*; Handbook M-41, *City Carriers Duties and Responsibilities*; and several national-level settlements have defined a process that both letter carriers and managers are required to follow when a letter carrier determines that they will be unable to complete their daily assignment within their normally scheduled time frame. Additionally, specific information on the Delivery Operations Information System (DOIS); PS Form 3996, *Carrier-Auxiliary Control*; and PS Form 1571, *Undelivered Mail Report* can be found beginning on page 81 of the 2023 *NALC Letter Carrier Resource Guide* also available in the “Resources” section of the NALC website under “Workplace Issues.” Here is some advice on how to handle these situations:

**1. Orally inform management:** Section 131.41 of Handbook M-41 requires the letter carrier to orally inform management when they are of the opinion that they will be unable to case all mail distributed to the route, perform other required duties, and leave on schedule, or when they will be unable to complete delivery of all mail.

**2. Request PS Form 3996:** Section 122.33 of Handbook M-39 requires management to provide, upon request by the employee, a PS Form 3996 after the supervisor has been orally informed as to the reason for the request. The employee shall not be denied the form, and upon request, a duplicate of the completed form will be provided to the employee.

Remember, you must request the PS Form 3996 and orally inform the supervisor of the reason for the request. If management refuses to provide a PS Form 3996, immediately request to see your steward.

**3. Fill out the PS Form 3996 completely:** Instructions for completing the form can be found on the back of the PS Form 3996. In the “Reason For Use of Auxiliary” section of the form, identify why you believe you cannot complete your assignment in eight hours. Fully explain the reasons for your request. Provide as much specificity as possible in lieu of using more general comments such as “heavy volume” or “route overburdened.” Supervisors may deny your request using DOIS projections as their justification. Multiple national-level settlements (e.g., M-01664 and M-01769) have held that these time projections cannot be used as the sole determinant of daily workload. Keep in mind, you are the professional letter carrier tasked with performing the duties of the assignment, and nothing can replace your estimate of how long that will take.

**4. Keep your cool:** While being challenged can be frustrating and demeaning, there is no benefit to getting angry. The best course of action is to remain calm and professional while following the process outlined. If your manager denies the request, advise them that you will do the best you can. In a professional manner, ask the manager for instructions as to what to do in the event you are unable to complete the assignment in the approved allotted time frame.

**5. Don’t argue:** There is no reason to argue with your manager at this point. Request a copy of the PS Form 3996 and continue with your assigned duties. Always work professionally and safely. You should never skip breaks or lunch to complete your assignment.

**6. Don’t make decisions:** Management is obligated to make decisions in accordance with contractual provisions. Once you realize that you will not be able to complete your assigned duties within the time frame approved by management, you should place the decision-making burden back on them by notifying management and requesting further instructions in accordance with any local directives. If no local directives exist, try contacting management two hours prior to the expiration of the approved time, or as soon as reasonably possible after confirming your inability to complete the assignment within the allotted time. Notify management of your location and the estimated time to complete the assignment. Again, ask management for further instructions and follow the instructions management gives you.

If management refuses to tell you what to do, or if you can’t finish your assigned duties in the amount of time initially specified by management, you should return to the office in the allotted time and ask for further instructions. Once again, you should follow whatever instructions management gives you.