

ARBITRATOR EISCHEN DENIES "FLETTERS" GRIEVANCE

In a long-awaited decision, National Arbitrator Dana Eischen denied the Association's class action grievance challenging the Postal Service's practice of commingling letter-sized mail with flats when mail sorted on flat-sorting machines is presented to rural carriers for casing. We are extremely disappointed with the outcome and distressed at the limited analysis Arbitrator Eischen gave to the issue in the final four pages of his decision. Arbitrator Eischen did not acknowledge and ignored altogether most of the arguments advanced by the Association in support of the grievance.

The Association argued that Chapter 2 of the PO-603 specifically provides that letter mail is to be presented to rural carriers for casing separately from flat mail, and that the method of casing letter mail is specifically prescribed in Section 222 (solid handful of letter mail all oriented in same direction). In his 2002 interest arbitration award, Arbitrator Wells granted the Postal Service's request to change the dimensions of a letter from 5 inches or less in width to 6-1/8 inches or less. The parties have referred to mail pieces between 5 and 6-1/8 inches as "fletters". Prior to Wells, the Postal Service sometimes sorted "fletters" together with larger flats on automated flat-sorting machines. That did not present a problem since all pieces sorted on that machine were then defined as flats. Since Wells, however, "fletters" are defined as letters and the Postal Service has continued to sort them on flat-sorting machines and to present them to carriers for casing commingled with flats.

Further, the Association argued that the separate presentation of letters and flats to carriers for casing is not only prescribed by PO-603, but is extremely important to carriers because of the different time standards applied to letters and flats during mail counts. We argued that the time standards are established based on carriers performing the task in the most efficient manner. Postal Service witnesses admitted such. Separate presentation of letters from flats matters because carriers cannot realize the time efficiencies of Section 222's required method of casing letters if letters are commingled with flats.

We showed Arbitrator Eischen that presentation of the mail has always mattered to the establishment of time standards. DPS letters require less handling and therefore receive less credit than casing of raw letters. The same with sector-segment letters. In the Helicopter Flats settlement, the parties agreed to enhanced credit for flats processed on the AFSM 1000 flat-sorting machine because that machine does not "provide a product that can be handled in the same manner as flats presented in relatively neat order" in the words of the settlement. We also showed that in performing its study which it presented in Wells in support of changing the letter and flat casing standards, the Postal Service timed carriers casing letters and flats separately, not commingled, and, in the case of letters, it timed carriers casing them in the efficient manner prescribed by Section 222 of PO-603. For some inexplicable reason, Arbitrator Eischen ignored and failed to address these Association arguments altogether.

The full text of Arbitrator Eischen's decision follows.

[Click here for full text of the award](#) **18.9 MB large file**

