

CCAs and on-the-job injuries

The NALC is excited to welcome the more than 30,000 new city carrier assistants (CCAs) around the country. You are a welcome addition to our ranks, especially in those offices struggling with understaffing and mandatory overtime issues. Like every other letter carrier out carrying the mail, you are susceptible to the same hazards and job-related injuries that career letter carriers know all too well.

As a federal employee, you are protected under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA), which provides benefits for federal employees who are injured on duty. The Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP) administers the FECA and has sole authority to award benefits. The FECA provides the right to medical care and wage-loss compensation for accepted injuries. The Postal Service has no obligation to inform you about your rights under FECA until after a job-related injury. The NALC wants you to know your rights now so that you will be prepared to exercise them if needed.

Many of you come to the Postal Service without health insurance. However, this should not complicate your ability to get the care you need for on-the-job injuries. The FECA grants an injured worker the right to choose his or her own doctor, and provides payment for all medical treatment that is necessary because of the accepted injury.

When you report a traumatic injury, such as a slip, trip or fall resulting requiring medical attention, the Postal Service must provide you with a CA-1, Notice of Traumatic Injury, and a CA-16, Authorization for Examination and/or Treatment. You fill out the front side of the CA-1. It asks for personal data as well as information regarding the nature of the injury. Near the bottom of the CA-1, you will see a box to check for either Continuation of Pay (COP) or sick/annual leave. As a CCA, you do not earn sick leave and might not have enough annual leave to cover your absence. COP keeps you paid for up to 45 days of absence from work due to disability or medical appointments. There is a three-day waiting period for payment of COP, but you can use any annual leave you have accrued to cover all or a portion of those three days.

FECA gives you the right to select a physician of your choice. The Postal Service representatives may tell you that they are going to take or send you to "their" doctor's office. You may be required to be *examined* by their doctor, but you are not required to be *treated* by their doctor.

Your claim will not be accepted if you are not treated by a physician. Most walk-in medical clinics normally are staffed by physician's assistants or nurse practitioners. Getting medical care from a qualified physician is an essential first step in the OWCP process.

Along with the CA-1, injured workers should receive a CA-16 from their supervisor prior to being treated. Form CA-16

is the form used in traumatic injuries to 1) authorize medical treatment, and 2) provide an initial medical report. The front of the CA-16 is completed and signed by management and guarantees payment by OWCP to the medical provider. This prevents injured workers from having any out-of-pocket expenses for an on-the-job injury.

The reverse side of the CA-16 is filled out by the treating physician, ensuring that OWCP immediately receives and reviews an initial medical report. Submission of accurate, timely medical reports to OWCP is vital in getting your claim accepted and your medical bills and wage-loss compensation paid. In far too many cases, postal management does not issue a CA-16 or fails to complete it properly. Thus, OWCP receives the initial medical report late or not at all. This results in delay of acceptance of claims, or even denial of claims.

CCAs should not feel intimidated in exercising their rights when injured on the job. Report any injury immediately to your supervisor and demand a CA-1 and CA-16 if you need medical attention. Postal managers are required to have them on hand and easily can print them from the postal intranet.

When you sign and submit a completed CA-1 to your supervisor, he or she is required to sign the receipt portion of the CA-1 and give it to you. This is important because the signed receipt will protect you in the event that OWCP later questions whether your claim of injury was timely submitted. You should let your shop steward know if your supervisor fails to sign and provide the CA-1 receipt.

In addition to the CA-1 receipt, the Postal Service is required to provide you with a complete copy of the CA-1 after it completes the reverse side. It is important that you review management's portion of the form for accuracy. Discrepancies in factual data can cause delays in claim approval.

Protect yourself and take the time to review and ensure that all forms are accurate. Always get copies of completed forms, the CA-1 and CA-16, as well as accident and medical reports. Keeping an up-to-date file of injury-related documents will be helpful in establishing your claim and assist us in helping you.

The NALC is committed to ensuring that every injured letter carrier receives his or her rights under FECA. Your shop stewards and branch officers are there to assist you as you use the OWCP process. You are protected by federal law and the NALC is here to help. We work for you.

Note: We will continue our series on the appeals process in future columns.