

Say no to paper claim forms



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Over the last decade, the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP) has fundamentally changed the way that injury claims are filed and processed. By 2012, all federal agencies, including USPS, were required to have employees file claims electronically via the ECOMP web portal. While most federal agencies complied within the time allowed, USPS did not fully enable ECOMP claim filing until the spring of 2020.

Due to the pandemic, the proper rollout of the ECOMP claim filing process did not get the attention it needed, and most USPS employees continued to file claims by requesting paper claim forms from their supervisor. At that time, USPS would complete its portion of the paper claim form, which would then be sent to an OWCP Case Create office in Jacksonville, FL.

When the Case Create office received the completed form, a file number would be issued, and the injured worker would receive a letter acknowledging the claim.

That changed in September 2020, when OWCP shut down the Case Create office. From that point forward, OWCP expected that all claims would be filed via the ECOMP web portal and that the paper forms would never be used again. However, due to the late entry into ECOMP claim filing, USPS continued, and continues, to accept paper claim forms from injured workers.

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This is because each paper claim form must then be entered into ECOMP by the district Occupational Health office. The recent postal reorganization shifted many new personnel into Occupational Health offices, and many employees are still learning how to do their jobs. By filling out a paper form, you are adding more work to an already overworked employee. It's like adding more deliveries to an already overburdened route being carried by a new employee.

So how can we fix this? The obvious place to start is by educating ourselves and our fellow workers on the basics of ECOMP claim filing. Letter carriers who are injured at work have the right to file a claim for their injuries, without any interference.

Injuries must be reported to your supervisor, but your supervisor does not have the right to tell you

whether or not you can file a claim or what claim form to file. Federal law protects the injured worker from such interference.

Any supervisor responsible for making reports in connection with an injury who willfully fails, neglects or refuses to do so; induces, compels or directs an injured employee to forego filing a claim; or willfully retains any notice, report or paper required in connection with an injury may be subject to a fine of not more than \$500 or one year in prison, or both.

With ECOMP, you do not have to ask your supervisor for an OWCP claim form. With ECOMP, you do not risk the claim form being lost or poorly transcribed. With ECOMP, you can monitor the claim's processing to ensure it is being properly handled.

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Take the first step in getting to know how ECOMP works by accessing the ECOMP home page at ecomp.dol.gov. On the upper right-hand corner of the page, click on the word "Help" to access claimant user guide videos. In less than a half hour, you can learn how to register, file claim forms and access claim file documents.

With the basic knowledge provided in the ECOMP videos, you can register and file a claim in ECOMP in a half hour or less—it's that easy. Once you've watched the videos, go ahead and register in ECOMP, even if you are not filing a claim. That way you can be ready should you ever have to file a claim, and you can share your newfound knowledge with your co-workers. You can even familiarize yourself with how filing a claim is done by going through the steps in filing a claim and stopping before submitting the form.

If you do not have a smartphone or a personal computer and cannot file a claim in ECOMP, contact your shop steward or union office. Every branch should recruit a shop steward or tech-savvy letter carrier who can master the ECOMP claim-filing process and assist fellow carriers in registering and filing a claim.

If you must file a paper claim, fill out the form completely and get a copy of the completed form before you give it to your supervisor. Then notify your shop steward or a branch officer that you have filed a claim and provide the name of the supervisor to whom you handed the form.