United States Government Accountability Office

May 2021

U.S. POSTAL SERVICE

Customer Complaints Process

Accessible Version

GAO@100

A Century of Non-Partisan Fact-Based Work

GAO-21-465

GAO Highlights

May 2021

U.S. POSTAL SERVICE

Customer Complaints Process

Why GAO Did This Study

USPS, one of the largest customer service organizations in the United States, has struggled to operate as a self-financing entity due primarily to declining mail volumes and increased costs. USPS has cited providing quality customer service as one of its goals and highlights customer service as important in sustaining its business. Despite creating an Office of Customer Experience in 2018, USPS continues to miss many of its stated goals related to customer experience and service.

GAO was asked to review how USPS handles residential customer complaints, including cases where customers may be experiencing repeated service issues. This report (1) describes USPS's processes for addressing and tracking residential customer complaints and (2) identifies the number and nature of residential customer complaints and how USPS uses residential customer complaint data. GAO reviewed and analyzed USPS's public reports and internal documents associated with customer complaints. GAO analyzed customer complaints data to, among other things, identify the number of residential addresses that reported repeated service complaints in fiscal year 2020. GAO used fiscal year 2020 data as all data shared the same fields and were collected under the current software system. GAO also conducted interviews with relevant USPS officials and staff to understand the processes and tools USPS uses to collect, address, and monitor complaints.

What GAO Found

The United States Postal Service (USPS) delivers mail to about 147-million residential addresses. To help it serve customers, USPS has a 5-step process for addressing and resolving residential customers' complaints. USPS defines a complaint as a reported service issue that is not resolved in a customer's initial contact with USPS and requires additional action to resolve. (See figure.) Once a complaint is received it is assigned to staff best positioned to respond to the issue. For example, a complaint about a missing package might be referred to a local Post Office for investigation and resolution if that Post Office was the destination facility for the package. USPS collects and tracks a range of customer service and complaint information using a new software system known as Customer 360 (C360). According to USPS officials, the C360 system, which USPS started using in 2019, captures more detailed data and has additional data fields, such as root cause, which may help officials identify service issues and analyze issues resulting in complaints. USPS officials also noted ongoing efforts to educate employees on the C360 system through trainings as well as efforts to collect feedback from users to help enhance the C360 system.

U.S. Postal Service's Five Step Customer Complaint Process

New	Assigned	Working	Resolved	Closed
A new complaint is entered into the Customer 360 (C360) system and a service request number is issued to the customer.	USPS staff review the complaint, and it is routed to a USPS facility (e.g., local Post Office) for further action.	USPS staff take action, such as searching for a missing package, to resolve the complaint.	USPS staff update the C360 system with details on the actions taken.	The C360 system sends a resolution notification to the customer and sets the complaint status to "Closed".

☎ Status is available to the customer if they call 1-800-ASK-USPS.

Sources: GAO and U.S. Postal Service (USPS). | GAO-21-465

Text of U.S. Postal Service's Five Step Customer Complaint Process

1. New.
   A new complaint is entered into the Customer 360 (C360) system and a service request number is issued to the customer.

2. Assigned.
   USPS staff review the complaint, and it is routed to a USPS facility (e.g., local Post Office) for further action.

3. Working.
   USPS staff take action, such as searching for a missing package, to resolve the complaint.

4. Resolved.
   USPS staff update the C360 system with details on the actions taken.

5. Closed.
   The C360 system sends a resolution notification to the customer and sets the complaint status to "Closed"

Most of the 10.7-million complaints USPS received in fiscal year 2020 concerned packages, and USPS analyzes C360 data to monitor timeliness in addressing these complaints. GAO's analysis of USPS's fiscal year 2020 residential complaints data found a total of 10.7-million residential customer complaints were reported by about 5.6 percent of the residential addresses USPS served. Most of these complaints—69 percent—were related to packages, such as missing or delayed packages. GAO found that about 21 percent of addresses that reported a complaint had more than one complaint. Of those addresses, a majority of complaints occurred less than one month apart, and many had two complaints with the same USPS-assigned root cause. USPS officials are currently reviewing whether the root cause field is accurately capturing the cause of a complaint. Across USPS, multiple officials told GAO they use the C360 system's reporting capabilities to access, review, and analyze complaints data. USPS officials said that given the size of their operations, it is not realistic to eliminate all complaints. The Office of Customer Experience monitors and assesses performance related to timeliness in contacting customers and closing complaints. Delivery operations staff use complaints data in conjunction with delivery operations information to identify service issues or specific causes for increases in complaints.

Contents

Abbreviations
C360   Customer 360
COVID-19   Coronavirus Disease 2019
USPS   U.S. Postal Service

441 G St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

May 25, 2021

The Honorable Margaret Wood Hassan
Chair
Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Spending Oversight,
Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs
United States Senate

Dear Madam Chair:

The U.S. Postal Service (USPS), one of the largest customer service organizations in the United States, has struggled to operate as a self-financing entity due primarily to declining mail volumes and increased costs. Given USPS's poor financial condition, USPS's financial viability has been on GAO's list of high-risk areas since 2009.[1] USPS has stated in its current 5-year strategic plan—for fiscal years 2020 to 2024—that one of its goals is to provide quality customer service, including improving how it resolves customer service issues, and also highlights in this plan that customer service has an important role in sustaining its business.[2] Further, in USPS's March 2021 10-year plan to achieve financial sustainability, USPS emphasized that customer service is a key part of its broader transformation strategy.[3]

In 2018, USPS created an Office of Customer Experience to help in addressing customer service, yet USPS continues to miss many of its performance goals related to customer experience and service. While specific situations, such as the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, may lead to service disruptions and increases in residential customer complaints, there are concerns about residential customers experiencing repeated service issues.[4] These concerns have led to

---

[1] GAO, *High-Risk Series: Dedicated Leadership Needed to Address Limited Progress in Most High-Risk Areas*, GAO-21-119SP (Washington, D.C.: March 2021)

[2] USPS, Ready-Now ➔ Future-Ready: The U.S. Postal Service Five-Year Strategic Plan FY2020-FY2024 (Washington, D.C.: January 2020)

[3] USPS, Delivering for America: Our Vision and Ten-Year Plan to Achieve Financial Sustainability and Service Excellence, (Washington, D.C.: March 2021)

[4] GAO, *U.S. Postal Service: Volume, Performance, and Financial Changes since the Onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic,* GAO-21-261 (Washington, D.C.: April 2021)

questions about USPS's processes for tracking, monitoring and resolving residential customer service issues.

You asked us to review how USPS handles residential customer complaints, including cases where customers may be experiencing repeated service issues. This report (1) describes USPS's processes for addressing and tracking residential customer complaints, and (2) identifies the number and nature of residential customer complaints and how USPS uses residential customer complaints data.

For both objectives we reviewed and analyzed USPS public reports—such as its 2018 through 2020 annual reports to Congress—and internal documents, such as training materials and user guides associated with the customer complaints process and its related software system. We also obtained and reviewed other reports, such as reports from the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General and the Postal Regulatory Commission that address topics related to USPS customer service and customer complaints. We conducted interviews with relevant USPS officials and staff to understand the processes and tools USPS uses to collect, address, and monitor these complaints as well as how USPS uses customer complaint data and USPS's current and future plans regarding customer complaint data analysis. These interviews included staff and officials in the Office of Customer Experience who handle residential customer complaints, including an Area Marketing Manager, and an interview with staff and officials in the Office of Delivery Operations that oversees mail and package delivery and has a role in the complaint resolution process. We also interviewed officials from the Postal Regulatory Commission and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service to discuss their roles in the customer complaint process.

To examine the extent to which customers reported repeated service complaints we analyzed USPS customer complaints data.[5] USPS officials told us the system retains 3 years of complaints data on a rolling basis. We reviewed and analyzed USPS customer complaint data from the second quarter of fiscal year 2018 through the end of fiscal year 2020. We are only reporting fiscal year 2020 information because USPS launched a new software system in August 2019 that resulted in some incomplete or changed data fields. In fiscal year 2020, all data shared the

---

[5] For the purposes of this analysis, we define repeated customer complaints as more than one complaint at the same address in fiscal year 2020.

same fields and were collected under the current software system.[6] We analyzed fiscal year 2020 customer complaint data to determine the following:

- The total number of reported customer complaints, including by complaint type.

- The number of residential addresses that reported one or more complaints, as well as the total number and time interval for consecutive complaints at addresses that reported more than one complaint.[7]

- The number of residential addresses that reported at least two complaints in less than a 30-day period with the same root cause recorded.[8]

We also interviewed USPS staff to discuss the customer complaints software system, the data USPS provided from the system, and topics related to data reliability. We determined the data are reliable for our purposes of describing the number and nature of residential customer complaints.

We conducted this performance audit from May 2020 to May 2021 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

---

[6] This time period would include the COVID-19 pandemic, but we did not asses how the pandemic might have affected the number of reported complaints.

[7] Our analysis of the time interval between complaints compared consecutive complaints, meaning the time frame could have occurred at any point during the fiscal year.

[8] Because not all complaints had a root cause denoted, we only considered records that had a root cause selected for both the first and second complaints.

Background

USPS Mission and Customers

USPS's mission is to provide prompt, reliable, and efficient universal postal service, and federal statute requires USPS to "provide postal services to bind the Nation together through the personal, educational, literary, and business correspondence of the people."[9] USPS is required to serve, as nearly as practicable, the entire population of the United States.[10] USPS is also the largest postal operator in the world, with over 495,000 career employees and delivering an estimated 43 percent of all mail sent globally. In fiscal year 2020, USPS reported a total mail and package volume of over 129 billion items.

To help deliver mail to about 147-million residential addresses in the United States, USPS has a geographically distributed workforce and infrastructure.[11] USPS has divided the country into four Retail and Delivery Operations Areas.[12] Within those areas, there are a total 50 Districts, which in turn contain over 34,000 Post Offices, supporting about 232,000 delivery routes.

USPS officials said there are two primary categories for its customers: business and residential. Business customers can range from small businesses to large corporations and retailers that use USPS services. These customers send and receive mail, such as bills, advertisements, and packages. Residential customers—who are the focus of this report

---

[9] 39 U.S.C. § 101(a).

[10] 39 U.S.C. § 403(a). USPS's universal service obligation is governed by several statutory provisions, including the requirement to provide a maximum degree of effective and regular postal services to rural areas, communities, and small towns where post offices are not self-sustaining. See 39 U.S.C. §§ 101(b), 3691(b)(1)(B).

[11] The total number of residential addresses was provided by USPS and accounts for about 131 million physical residences as well as about 16 million post office boxes they attribute to residential use.

[12] The four USPS Retail and Delivery Operations Areas are: Atlantic, Central, Southern, and Western-Pacific.

and the customers we will be discussing throughout—are generally individuals or families.[13] They send and receive mail and packages, but it is often at lower volumes than a business customer.

USPS Customer Service

USPS has identified providing quality experience—which includes customer service as a goal in its Annual Reports to Congress. In its fiscal year 2020 annual report to Congress, USPS noted that to evaluate customers' satisfaction with USPS services, customers are surveyed at seven key interaction points with the results from those seven surveys generating a Customer Experience Composite Index score.[14] According to USPS officials, this Index is designed to be a high-level indicator of customer satisfaction with USPS services. Customer complaints data are one component of the overall Index score. The target and actual scores for each of the seven surveys and the Customer Experience Composite Index score are reported in USPS's annual report to Congress. The fiscal year 2020 report showed a higher (better) overall Composite Index score than the prior year, though the score was lower than USPS's stated goal.[15] However, the Customer Experience Composite Index does not capture other elements of USPS performance—such as not meeting any of its fiscal year 2020 targets for on-time mail delivery and its ongoing financial difficulties.

In 2018, USPS created the Office of Customer Experience and an associated Vice President position. According to the USPS website, the Vice President and this office are charged with developing an effective customer strategy that drives a customer focus into all aspects of USPS. The Vice President and this office are responsible for oversight of Customer Experience Composite Index surveys, as well as for oversight

[13] USPS officials noted that some micro-businesses or home-based small businesses may be reflected in the residential customer complaint data as they are using USPS services more like a residential customer than a business.

[14] The seven surveys for fiscal year 2020 were: (1) Business Service Network, (2) Point of Sale, (3) Delivery, (4) Customer Care Center, (5) Customer 360, (6) USPS.com, and (7) Business Mail Entry Unit. In fiscal year 2019, the Customer 360 survey was named Enterprise Customer Care for the prior software system that managed complaints, but definition of the survey as a metric for customer experience did not change.

[15] In fiscal year 2020, the Customer Experience Composite Index score was 72.4 out of a target of 75.7 compared to the fiscal year 2019 score of 69 out of a target of 78.3. Additionally, of the 8 metrics reported, in fiscal year 2020 USPS met 4 of 8 metrics compared to the prior year's 2 out of 8 metrics met.

of the customer complaint process and the software tool used to address and monitor residential customer complaints. This office also manages the USPS Customer Care Centers that receive customer calls, Area Marketing Managers who have a key role in the customer complaints process, and the Consumer Advocate department. This office reports to the Chief Customer and Marketing Officer and Executive Vice President. Figure 1 below shows the Office of Customer Experience organizational structure, including the different offices contained within it.

Figure 1: U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Office of Customer Experience's Organizational Chart
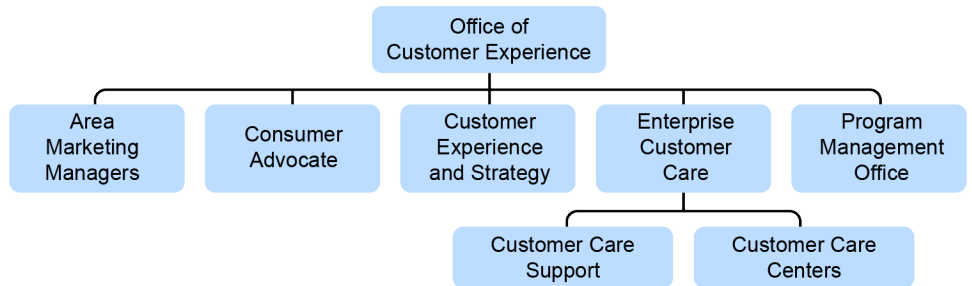
Sources: GAO and U.S. Postal Service (USPS). | GAO-21-465

Text of Figure 1: U.S. Postal Service (USPS) Office of Customer Experience's Organizational Chart

1) Office of Customer Experience

   a) Area Marketing Managers

   b) Consumer Advocate

   c) Customer experience and strategy

   d) Enterprise customer care

      i) customer care support

      ii) customer care centers

   e) Program management office

As we discuss later in the report, there are other staff who are not part of the Office of Customer Experience but are involved in providing customer service and resolving complaints.

USPS Has a Residential Complaint Resolution Process and a New Software System for Tracking Those Customer Complaints

USPS Uses a Defined Process to Address Residential Customer Complaints

USPS uses a five-step process to address and track customer complaints. USPS considers a complaint to be a reported service issue that cannot be resolved during the customer's initial contact and that

Mail Theft and Other Mail-Related Criminal Investigations

Two U.S. Postal Service (USPS) affiliated entities have a role in handling certain customer concerns. The U.S. Postal Inspection Service and the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General handle customer contacts where theft of mail is suspected. They refer any other delivery service issues they receive from customers to USPS for further assistance.

U.S. Postal Inspection Service: investigates criminal matters—such as theft of mail or other mail-related criminal activity—committed by a non-USPS employee. If a customer were to report an issue where criminal activity is suspected, USPS would forward the complaint to the U.S. Postal Inspection Service for further action. The U.S. Postal Inspection Service maintains a separate database for tracking and addressing criminal complaints. Additionally, USPS works with staff from the U.S. Postal Inspection Service to provide customer complaints data that could aid U.S. Postal Inspection Service in intelligence gathering efforts to track potential mail and package thefts.

U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General: investigates cases where suspected theft of mail or mail-related criminal activity involves a USPS employee. The U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General also investigates service issues at individual postal facilities. These investigations may be sparked by customer complaints. The resulting reports often have recommendations for action and are available to the public on the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General website.

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Postal Inspection Service and U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General information. | GAO-21-465

requires further action by USPS staff to resolve it.[16] According to USPS officials, the basic complaint process has been the same for a number of years, but the software system used to support the process—the Customer 360 (C360) system discussed in greater detail later in the report—is new. The five steps in the process have corresponding statuses in the C360 software system. If theft or criminal activity were suspected as the cause of the customer's complaint, the issue would be forwarded to either the U.S. Postal Inspection Service or the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General for further action. (See sidebar for further information.)

Management and staff in the Office of Customer Experience oversee the process for collecting, addressing, and monitoring residential customer service complaints, and told us they are in close contact with other staff and USPS offices involved in the process.[17] The steps in this process are:

1. **New.** A customer's issue that cannot be resolved during the initial contact with USPS is considered a new complaint and a service request is initiated in C360. C360 assigns a service request number to track the complaint.

2. **Assigned.** USPS staff, usually at the call centers, route the complaint to either the District Consumer and Industry Contact office or a Post Office. Staff at these offices are responsible for contacting the customer within one business day to provide the service request number and collect any additional information. Staff in these offices are also responsible for coordinating a resolution to the issue.

3. **Working.** The assigned staff investigate and coordinate with others as appropriate to identify and resolve the issue. This may include reaching out to staff at a sorting facility to check package scanning data or search the facility to locate a missing package. The USPS

---

[16] In fiscal year 2020, USPS reported to GAO that residential customers most frequently contacted USPS about service issues by calling a service center or messages and email sent through USPS.com—an option that became available in fiscal year 2019. In addition to phone and email contacts, USPS also tracks customer contacts made through online chat, letters, in-person contacts such as at local Post Offices, as well as complaints forwarded by the Office of Inspector General, Postal Regulatory Commission inquiries, and Congressional Offices. Business customers have additional avenues for reporting a service issue to USPS, such as accessing the USPS Business Customer Gateway.

[17] USPS officials told us the process for handling business complaints is similar but, other than very small business operators, business customer service would be handled in another office using a system similar to C360.

staff who are assigned to the complaint then record the details of the actions in C360.

4. **Resolved.** Once the assigned staff determine the actions taken have resolved the issue, they update C360 with additional details including resolution information from pre-populated dropdown menus. After staff enter resolution information into C360, the system updates the status to "resolved". Staff may also use fields that allow notes to capture relevant details about the action taken or possible cause of the complaint.

5. **Closed.** After C360 updates the complaint status to "resolved," it automatically sends a final resolution communication to the USPS customer via the customer's preferred contact method, letting the customer know the issue has been resolved. The system updates the complaint's status to "closed".

If customers are not satisfied with how a complaint was resolved, the customer can reply to USPS via email or phone to state that they do not think the issue has been resolved. Such a reply would trigger the C360 system to change the complaint status to "Reopened" and the complaint would be sent back to USPS staff for further action, such as additional investigation into the complaint. USPS reported to us that about 3 percent of all the complaints received in fiscal year 2020 were reopened.

USPS Uses a New Software System to Track Customer Complaints

USPS officials told us that they started to use their new C360 software system in August 2019 and that they view it as an integral tool in the customer complaint process, allowing USPS to collect and track customer service data. Customer service data can be used for a variety of purposes, as we discuss later in this report.[18] The officials told us that the main purpose of C360 is to collect and track complaints information to aid in resolving specific customer complaints as expediently as possible.

USPS officials said the new system has a number of benefits, among them that the C360 system captures more detailed data as well as additional data fields than the prior system. The officials said the additional information helps them to resolve complaints and analyze

---

[18] USPS officials told us the USPS replaced its prior system because it was obsolete and no longer supported by the manufacturer.

complaint data. For example, the prior system had five broad categories for the type of complaints, while the new system has 14 categories. Officials said this helps USPS staff better categorize and route complaints to the facility and staff best able to address the issues.[19] For example, the type of action needed or staff involved in resolving a Package Inquiry complaint (e.g., searching a facility for a package) would be different from handling a Change of Address complaint (e.g., updating an address entry in a computer system).

Similarly, the added data fields in the C360 system, including a root cause field, allow staff to capture more detailed information about the nature of the reported issue and its resolution. In most cases, before USPS staff resolve and close a complaint in C360, they must select a root cause from a pre-populated drop-down menu of phrases intended to briefly summarize the suspected reason for the complaint.[20] USPS officials said that the "root cause" field is often more of an additional descriptive field than something that is actionable and solves for underlying issues leading to service issues. Officials said this field was added in 2019 in part to aid in internal analysis of and reporting on complaints. Officials in the Office of Customer Experience told us they are currently reviewing the root cause field specifically to determine if the data collected are adequately capturing the cause of complaints and to understand the number of complaints based on the noted root cause. They anticipate having results by the end of calendar year 2021.

USPS officials also noted that the C360 system provided reporting capabilities not available with the previous system. The C360 system can generate standard reports for users and also allows users to generate custom reports by selecting specific data fields. Users can access data and run reports at the National, Area, District, and facility levels. As we discuss below, these reports can be used to monitor USPS performance for addressing customer complaints.

According to officials in the Office of Customer Experience, they are continuing to educate users on the capabilities of the C360 system and to enhance the system. To improve issue resolution, the officials said they

---

[19] The 14 categories, called Case Inquiry Type in the C360 system are: Personnel, General Inquiry, Package Inquiry, Redelivery, Technical Inquiry, Business Inquiry, Change of Address, Daily Mail Service, Facility, GXC Escalation, Hold Mail, Package Pickup, Premium Forwarding Service, and Stamps Fulfillment Service Inquiry.

[20] A root cause is not required for complaints in the Business, Personnel, or Premium Forwarding Service categories.

Letter

plan to develop supplemental-training materials and guides for users. In addition, officials said they plan to create two cross-functional teams of subject matter experts to coach and train personnel who use the C360 system and address complaints. Currently, the Office of Customer Experience uses teleconferences and email to provide regular updates on system capabilities and enhancements as well as providing avenues, such as an email point of contact to collect feedback on the system from the users. These efforts help ensure all users are up to date with the C360 system and its capabilities as well as provide information to inform system enhancements. In late 2020, the Office of Customer Experience formed an executive-level C360 steering committee to improve the overall user experience and take a strategic look at the C360 system and the data it collects. As a part of this effort, the steering committee launched a C360 working group to collect information from C360 users about their experiences with the system to help the committee understand how users access and use system data and areas that users think could be enhanced.

Most of the 10.7-Million Fiscal Year 2020 Complaints Concerned Packages, and Data Are Used Primarily to Track Performance in Addressing Customer Complaints

In Fiscal Year 2020 Over 7-Million Complaints Were Package Inquires, and Most Repeat Complaints Occurred within 30 Days

Most of the 10.7-million residential customer complaints USPS received in fiscal year 2020—69 percent—were package inquiries and the leading reason for complaints recorded in the USPS-assigned root cause field was "package not delivered on expected delivery day/ time." Those complaints came from 8.2-million residential addresses, or about 5.6 percent of the total 147-million residential addresses USPS serviced that year. Figure 2 below shows all complaints received in fiscal year 2020 by the type of complaint and the USPS-assigned root causes.

Figure 2: U.S. Postal Service's (USPS) Reported Residential Complaints by Complaint Type and USPS-Assigned Root Cause for Fiscal Year 2020

Customer complaint type

USPS-assigned root cause
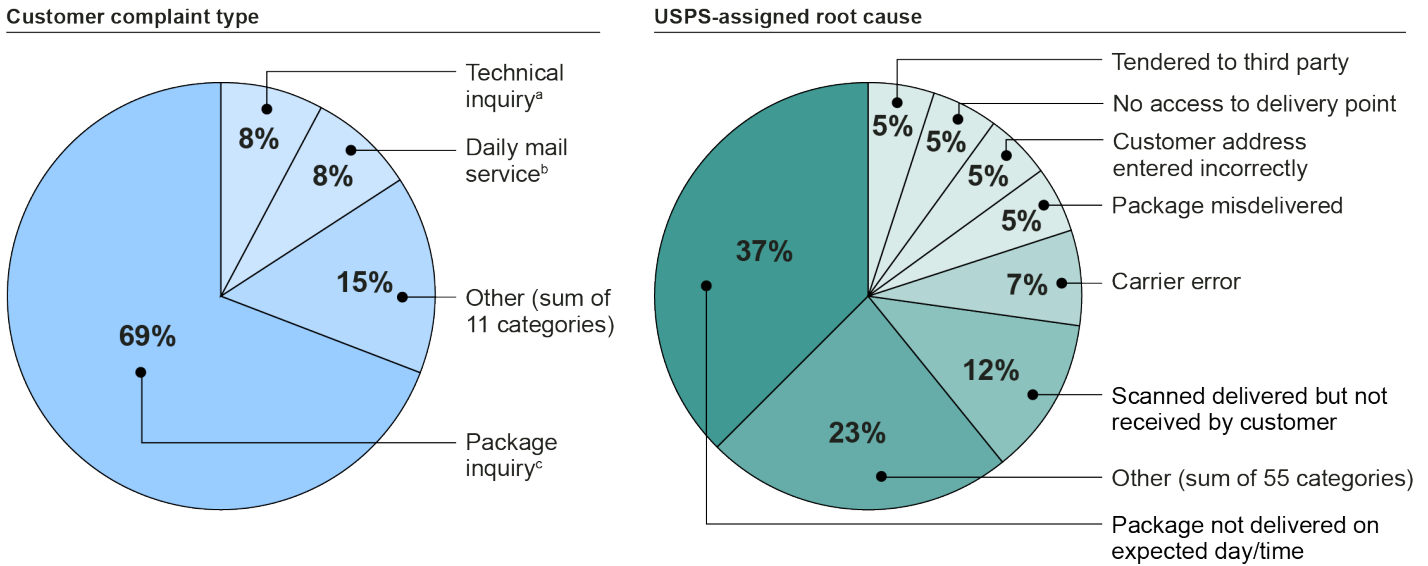
Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Postal Service (USPS) information. | GAO-21-465

Data table for Figure 2: U.S. Postal Service's (USPS) Reported Residential Complaints by Complaint Type and USPS-Assigned Root Cause for Fiscal Year 2020

| Customer complaint type	Technical inquiry	Daily mail service	Other (sum of 11 categories)	Package inquiry
Percentage	8	8	15	69

UPS-assigned root cause	Tendered to third party	No access to delivery point	Customer address entered incorrectly	Package misdelivered	Carrier error	Scanned delivered but not received by customer	Other (sum of 55 categories	Package not delivered on expected day/time
Percentage	5	5	5	5	7	12	23	37

[a]Technical inquiry includes any calls and complaints related to USPS.com functions and services.

[b]Daily mail service includes all complaints related to mail delivery, including damaged or missing mail.

[c]Package inquiry includes any complaint regarding a package, excluding package pick-up request complaints.

Our analysis of USPS's fiscal year 2020 residential customer complaint data showed that of the addresses reporting multiple complaints, most reported the next complaint within 30 days. In addition, USPS assigned the same root cause to many of the subsequent complaints. Specifically, our analysis showed that 1.7-million (about 21 percent) of the 8.2-million residential addresses that reported a complaint in fiscal year 2020

reported more than one complaint in that year.[21] Of the 1.7-million addresses with multiple complaints, we found that 66 percent reported those complaints less than one month apart. We also found that roughly 41 percent of the repeat complaints were assigned the same root cause by USPS. (See fig. 3.) The same root cause for recurring complaints may indicate that even though the initial complaint was "resolved" by USPS, the underlying issue that led to the complaint had not been addressed. As noted above, USPS officials are reviewing the root cause field specifically to determine if the data collected are adequately capturing the cause of complaints.

Figure 3: Information on Addresses Reporting Repeat Residential Customer Complaints to the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) in Fiscal Year 2020
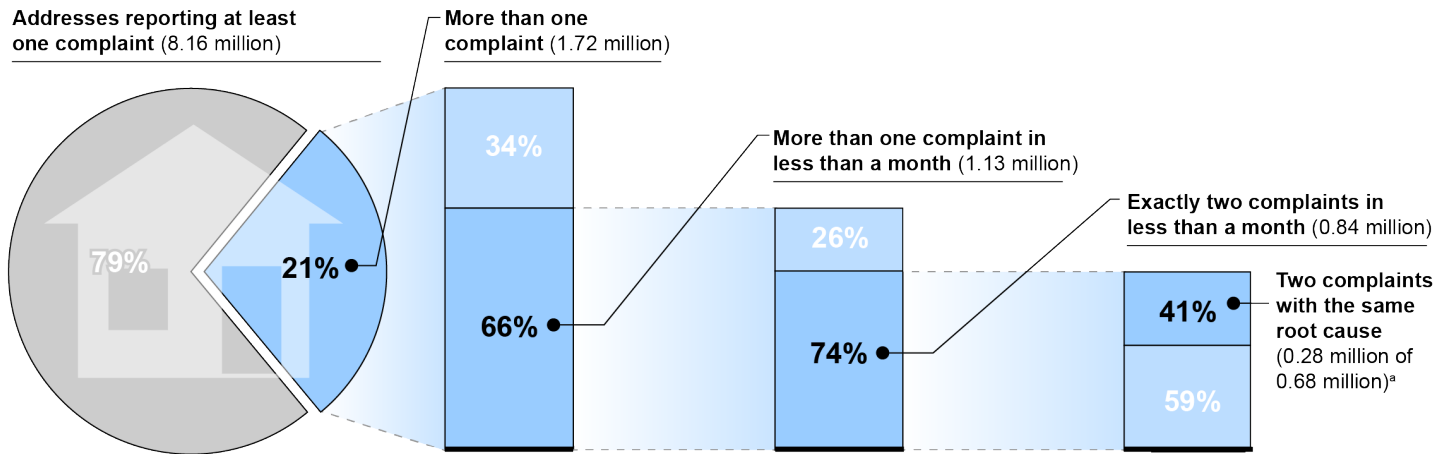
Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Postal Service information. | GAO-21-465

Data table for Figure 3: Information on Addresses Reporting Repeat Residential Customer Complaints to the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) in Fiscal Year 2020

Complaint category	Number (in millions)	Percentage
Addresses reporting at least one complaint	8.16	-
Addresses reporting more than one complaint	1.72	21% of addresses reporting at least one complaint
Addresses reporting more than one complaint in less than a month	1.13	66% of addresses reporting more than one complaint
Addresses reporting exactly two complaints in less than a month	0.84	74% of addresses reporting more than one complaint in less than a month

[21] Our analysis does not include reopened complaints. As described earlier in this report, reopened complaints are instances when USPS considered a complaint resolved, but the customer did not agree and contacts USPS to have it reopened.

Complaint category	Number (in millions)	Percentage
Addresses reporting two complaints with the same root cause	0.28 of 0.68	41% of addresses reporting exactly two complaints in less than a month

[a]Not all complaints had a root cause selected. This population reflects records that had a root cause selected for both the first and second complaints.

USPS Officials Use Complaints Data to Monitor Timeliness in Addressing Complaints and to Identify Areas for Additional Attention

USPS officials noted that given the size of their operations and the volume of mail and package deliveries, it is not realistic to eliminate all complaints. Instead, they said the focus is on meeting their metrics to address and resolve complaints quickly because they believe these metrics correlate with customer satisfaction and a positive customer experience. To do this, offices and staff at all levels of the organization can access complaints data and the C360 system. USPS officials reported using the data to monitor timeliness in addressing complaints or in conjunction with other USPS data and information to examine service issues.

Officials in the Office of Customer Experience told us they primarily use customer complaint data as a performance indicator. As noted above, the main purpose of the C360 system and its resulting data on complaints is to address and track individual complaints as they move through the complaint resolution process. The officials in the Office of Customer Experience said they use C360 data to track the extent to which customers are contacted within one business day of making a complaint and the extent to which complaints are closed within 3 business days. USPS officials in the Office of Customer Experience told us that in fiscal year 2020 their goal was 100 percent timeliness for both the initial contact and complaint closure metrics, and that they met the initial contact metric 82 percent of the time and the 3-days-to-close metric 76 percent of the time.[22]

An Area Marketing Manager we spoke with gave an example of how officials at the Area level use standard system reports to view the volume

---

[22] USPS officials said that in early fiscal year 2020 there was a system issue that resulted in some residential customer complaints not having the initial contact's date field completed. Those cases are excluded from the reported percentages.

of complaints in their Area that are due for initial contact or resolution on any given day and the progress toward meeting certain metrics. The Area Marketing Manager said that these reports can be analyzed at the national level—which can give managers and staff in Areas and Districts a sense of how their performance compares to other Areas and Districts—as well as at the Area and District levels. Additionally, he noted that Areas and Districts use these reports as an indicator of their timeliness performance. The Area Marketing Manager stated that twice a day, his office sends the reports to Districts for review and action as appropriate. These reports enable the District to take immediate action if it is not meeting the goals and can be used to identify trends in performance on a weekly or monthly basis.

USPS officials from the Office of Delivery Operations stated they use customer complaint data, in conjunction with other data systems, as an indicator of their delivery service performance. They said that complaint data alone do not provide much insight into overall service issues but when combined with data from other systems it can provide additional context that can help officials identify and address service issues. For example, officials in the Office of Delivery Operations told us they use complaint data, along with data from other systems, to understand delivery performance at the District level. They said they use customer complaint data on the volume of complaints to create a list of the 25 Districts that have the highest number of reported complaints. These officials told us that with this list as a starting point, Area and District staff can use other data systems to identify the specific delivery routes contributing to the number of complaints. For example, staff can combine complaint data with package scanning data to identify a route or facility that is experiencing package backlogs. In this way, officials in the Office of Delivery Operations said that they and the officials at the District level can use the list to understand their performance and focus resources on addressing service issues to reduce complaints and improve the District's ranking. Their goal is to reduce the rate of complaints since officials do not expect to be able to eliminate all complaints given the nature and volume of mail services.

Agency Comments
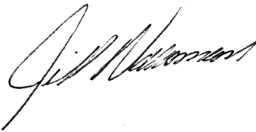
We provided a draft of this report to USPS for comment. USPS provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

As agreed with your office, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from the report date. At that time, we will send copies to the appropriate congressional committees, the Postmaster General, and other interested parties. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO website at https://www.gao.gov.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-2834 or naamanej@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix II.

Sincerely yours,

Jill Naamane
Acting Director, Physical Infrastructure Issues

Appendix I: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgment

GAO Contact

Jill Naamane, (202) 512-2834 or naamanej@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Maria Edelstein (Assistant Director); Betsey Ward-Jenks (Analyst in Charge); Melissa Bodeau; Geoffrey Hamilton; Serena Lo, Joshua Ormond; Michael Soressi, Breana Stevens; Janet Temko-Blinder and John Yee made key contributions to this report.

GAO's Mission

The Government Accountability Office, the audit, evaluation, and investigative arm of Congress, exists to support Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and accountability of the federal government for the American people. GAO examines the use of public funds; evaluates federal programs and policies; and provides analyses, recommendations, and other assistance to help Congress make informed oversight, policy, and funding decisions. GAO's commitment to good government is reflected in its core values of accountability, integrity, and reliability.

Obtaining Copies of GAO Reports and Testimony

The fastest and easiest way to obtain copies of GAO documents at no cost is through our website. Each weekday afternoon, GAO posts on its website newly released reports, testimony, and correspondence. You can also subscribe to GAO's email updates to receive notification of newly posted products.

Order by Phone

The price of each GAO publication reflects GAO's actual cost of production and distribution and depends on the number of pages in the publication and whether the publication is printed in color or black and white. Pricing and ordering information is posted on GAO's website, https://www.gao.gov/ordering.htm.

Place orders by calling (202) 512-6000, toll free (866) 801-7077, or TDD (202) 512-2537.

Orders may be paid for using American Express, Discover Card, MasterCard, Visa, check, or money order. Call for additional information.

Connect with GAO

Connect with GAO on Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, and YouTube.
Subscribe to our RSS Feeds or Email Updates. Listen to our Podcasts.
Visit GAO on the web at https://www.gao.gov.

To Report Fraud, Waste, and Abuse in Federal Programs

Contact FraudNet:

Website: https://www.gao.gov/about/what-gao-does/fraudnet

Automated answering system: (800) 424-5454 or (202) 512-7700

Congressional Relations

Orice Williams Brown, Managing Director, WilliamsO@gao.gov, (202) 512-4400,
U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7125,
Washington, DC 20548

Public Affairs

Chuck Young, Managing Director, youngc1@gao.gov, (202) 512-4800
U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7149
Washington, DC 20548

Strategic Planning and External Liaison

Stephen J. Sanford, Acting Managing Director, spel@gao.gov, (202) 512-4707
U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7814,
Washington, DC 20548