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Highlights

Highlights of GAO-21-465, report to the Chair, Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Spending Oversight, Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, U.S. Senate

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.

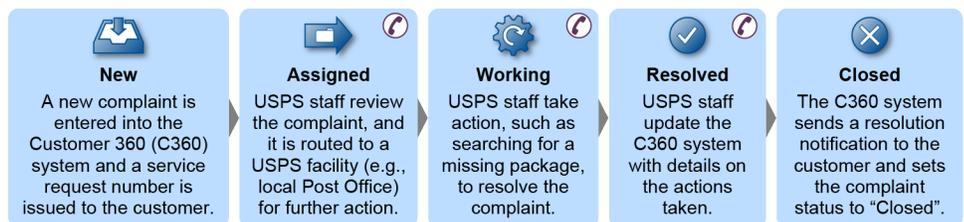View GAO-21-465. For more information, contact Jill Naamane at (202) 512-2834 or NaamaneJ@gao.gov.

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

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.