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U.S. Postal Service Workforce Size and Employment Categories, 1987-2007

Abstract
[Excerpt] This report provides data from the past two decades on the size of the U.S. Postal Service's (USPS's) workforce, the number of persons employed by USPS by employment categories, and the number of persons employed by USPS under time-limited contracts. It also analyzes the most salient aspects of these employment data. USPS employs nearly 786,000 persons. Although USPS's workforce size has changed relatively little from 20 years ago, it has dropped 12% in the past decade. The number of career employees declined 8.8% since 1987; however, the number of non-career employees increased 106.5%. Clerks, who staff retail counters at post offices and manually sort mail, dropped more than 31% since 1987. Rural mail delivery carriers, in contrast, grew 84.9%; and building and equipment maintenance personnel and vehicle maintenance personnel grew 28.7% and 14.9%, respectively. This report will be updated at the beginning of each new Congress.

Keywords
U.S. Postal Service, USPS, workforce, employment, statistics, categories

Comments

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CRS Report for Congress

U.S. Postal Service Workforce Size and Employment Categories, 1987-2007

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Summary

This report provides data from the past two decades on the size of the U.S. Postal Service's (USPS's) workforce, the number of persons employed by USPS by employment categories, and the number of persons employed by USPS under time-limited contracts. It also analyzes the most salient aspects of these employment data. USPS employs nearly 786,000 persons. Although USPS's workforce size has changed relatively little from 20 years ago, it has dropped 12% in the past decade. The number of career employees declined 8.8% since 1987; however, the number of non-career employees increased 106.5%. Clerks, who staff retail counters at post offices and manually sort mail, dropped more than 31% since 1987. Rural mail delivery carriers, in contrast, grew 84.9%; and building and equipment maintenance personnel and vehicle maintenance personnel grew 28.7% and 14.9%, respectively. This report will be updated at the beginning of each new Congress.

Data Source

Each year, the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) issues an *Annual Report* (herein, the *Report*) that includes data on its workforce.[1] The *Report* categorizes employees as either "career employees" or "non-career employees." According to USPS, the career employees category includes persons with permanent positions at USPS, part- and full-time. The non-career employees category includes all persons hired under time-limited contracts.[2] The *Report* also provides breakdowns of the number of workers by employment categories (e.g., regional offices personnel, clerks, and nurses). The

[1] This report originally was written by Kevin R. Kosar. Readers may contact Wendy Ginsberg with questions about postal employment issues.

[2] The data on non-career employment do not include persons carrying out postal functions outsourced to private firms. For example, USPS no longer has a fleet of cargo aircraft. Today, the Postal Service contracts with United Parcel Service and other private firms for the transportation of mail by air. The persons who fly and maintain these planes are excluded from the data on non-career employees.

Appendix of this report presents brief descriptions of these employment categories. This report provides workforce data drawn from the *Reports* covering 1987 through 2007.[3]

Data Analysis

Workforce Size. The size of USPS's workforce changed relatively little during the past two decades, decreasing from 799,800 employees in 1987 to 785,929 employees in 2007 (**Table 1, Figure 1**). Figures from just the beginning and ending dates, however, mask a rise in career employees in the first decade and a decline in career employees in the second decade. Since 1997, the total workforce has decreased by 12%. Clerks, for example, fell from 280,818 in 1997 to 204,145 (27.3%) in 2007.

Career Employees vs. Non-career Employees. The number of career employees decreased by 8.8% between 1987 and 2007, from 750,808 to 684,762, while non-career USPS employees increased by 106.5%, from 48,992 to 101,167 (**Table 1**). Although 10 of the 18 career employee categories had fewer employees in 2007 than in 1987 (e.g., the number of postmasters/installation heads declined by 8.8%),[4] all five of the non-career employment categories had more employees than in 1987. Despite the decline in career employees, they constituted the vast majority of USPS's workforce during the past two decades (**Figure 1, Table 2**). The percentage of USPS's workforce consisting of career employees declined from 93.9% to 85.7% between 1987 and 1997, but increased to 88.1% in 2002. The percentage declined again in 2007 to 87.1%.

Employment Categories. While the size of each employment category shifted over the past 20 years, three trends are marked. First, "rural" employment categories grew significantly. Full-time rural delivery carriers rose from 36,551 to 67,584 (84.9%), and rural substitute carriers/rural carrier associates/rural carrier relief carriers/auxiliary carriers (rural subs/RCA/RCR/AUX) increased from 29,831 to 60,444 (102.6%). In contrast, the number of city delivery carriers rose 1.7% between 1987 and 2002 (229,706 and 233,639 respectively), but it has dropped 4.9% since 2002 to 222,132.

Second, three categories of USPS employees involved in the transportation of mail prior to its delivery have grown between 14.9% and 24.1% since 1987. Mail handlers rose 18.4%, from 48,879 to 57,882; and motor vehicle operators increased 24.1%, from 7,031 to 8,726. Vehicle maintenance personnel, who play a supporting role in mail transportation, increased 14.9%, from 4,705 to 5,405.

Third, clerks, who staff the retail counters at post offices and manually sort mail, decreased 31.1% in the past two decades, from 296,360 to 204,145.[5]

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[3] U.S. Postal Service, *Annual Report of the Postmaster General* (Washington: USPS, 1985-1995); and U.S. Postal Service, *Annual Report of the U.S. Postal Service* (Washington: USPS, 1996-2007).

[4] Two career employment positions, regional office employees and special delivery messengers, were eliminated.

[5] Postmasters and postmaster replacements also perform retail activities in some instances.

Table 1. Number of USPS Employees by Employment Category, 1987-2007

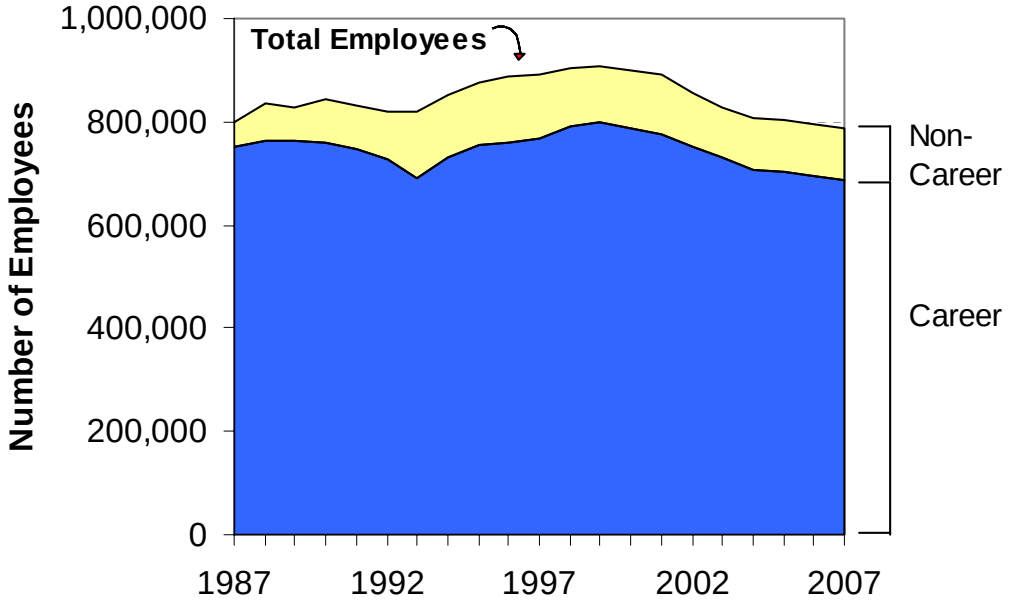
(five-year intervals)

Employment Category	1987	1992	1997	2002	2007	Change 1987-2007	Change (%) 1987-2007
Career Employees							
Headquarters	2,101	2,434	1,949	1,712	2,856	755	35.9%
Headquarters — Related Field Units	5,792	5,663	4,319	3,848	4,527	-1,265	-21.8%
Inspection Service — Field	4,278	4,324	4,347	3,875	2,991	-1,287	-30.1%
Inspector General	0	0	101	722	1,147	1,147	—
Area Offices Personnel	0	0	1,566	2,107	1,281	1,281	—
Regional Offices	431	586	0	0	0	-431	-100.0%
Postmasters/ Installation Heads	27,735	26,496	26,256	25,771	25,285	-2,450	-8.8%
Supervisors/ Managers	43,076	43,185	35,708	37,829	32,635	-10,441	-24.2%
Prof. Admin. and Tech. Personnel	10,582	10,440	11,369	9,661	8,058	-2524	-23.9%
Clerks	296,360	268,049	280,818	256,656	204,145	-92,215	-31.1%
Nurses	325	286	193	173	160	-165	-50.8%
Mail Handlers	48,879	49,520	59,147	59,259	57,882	9,003	18.4%
City Delivery Carriers	229,706	223,088	234,033	233,639	222,132	-7,574	-3.3%
Motor Vehicle Operators	7,031	7,086	8,625	9,092	8,726	1,695	24.1%
Rural Delivery Carriers — Full-time	36,551	43,283	49,957	60,817	67,584	31,033	84.9%
Special Delivery Messengers	2,209	1,742	1,331	0	0	-2,209	-100.0%
Bldg. and Equip. Maint. Personnel	31,047	34,367	39,954	42,275	39,948	8,901	28.7%
Vehicle Maintenance Personnel	4,705	4,741	5,501	5,513	5,405	700	14.9%
Subtotal	**750,808**	**725,290**	**765,174**	**752,949**	**684,762**	**-66,046**	**-8.8%**

Employment Category	1987	1992	1997	2002	2007	Change 1987-2007	Change (%) 1987-2007
Non-career Employees							
Casuals	9,621	27,204	32,615	19,065	22,078	12,457	129.5%
Non-bargaining Temporary	297	603	774	807	1,244	947	318.9%
Rural Subs/RCA/RCR/ AUX	29,831	43,830	54,834	56,474	60,444	30,613	102.6%
Postmaster Relief/Leave Replacements	9,243	12,415	12,687	12,234	12,169	2,926	31.7%
Transitional Employees	0	9,732	26,789	12,847	5,232	5,232	—
Subtotal	**48,992**	**93,784**	**127,699**	**101,427**	**101,167**	**52,175**	**106.5%**
Total Employees	**799,800**	**819,074**	**892,873**	**854,376**	**785,929**	**-13,871**	**-1.7%**

Source: CRS analysis of data provided by USPS.

Figure 1. Total, Career, and Non-career Employees



Source: CRS analysis of data provided by USPS.

Table 2. Career and Non-career Employees as Percentage of USPS Workforce
(five-year intervals)

Employees	1987	1992	1997	2002	2007
Career Employees	93.9%	88.5%	85.7%	88.1%	87.1%
Non-career Employees	6.1%	11.5%	14.3%	11.9%	12.9%
Total:	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Source: CRS analysis of data provided by USPS.

Appendix. Brief Descriptions of USPS Employment Categories[6]

Career Employees

Headquarters: Includes persons who work in a variety of capacities at the two central offices of the U.S. Postal Service, which are located in Washington, DC, and Rosslyn, Virginia.

Headquarters — Related Field Units: Includes persons in offices administered from USPS's headquarters, but who are located elsewhere.

Inspection Service — Field: Includes persons who work for the Postal Inspection Service, which protects USPS property and employees and investigates alleged misuse of the mails for criminal purposes.

Inspector General: Includes persons who work for the USPS Office of Inspector General, which audits and investigates USPS activities.

Area Offices Personnel: Includes persons who work in the USPS administrative units that oversee postal operations in USPS's nine geographic areas throughout the United States.

Regional Offices: Included persons in the administrative unit that oversaw USPS operations within geographic regions. Regional offices were replaced with area offices.

Postmasters/Installation Heads: Includes persons who serve as managers of retail postal facilities.

Supervisors/Managers: Includes persons who supervise other persons or who manage programs or processes.

Professional Administrative and Technical Personnel: Includes persons performing administrative assistance and technical support duties.

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[6] These employment categories are those used by USPS in its *Annual Report*. The definitions were composed by the author of this report in consultation with USPS.

Clerks: Includes persons who work directly with the public in USPS retail facilities and who manually sort mail.

Nurses: Includes persons who work in USPS medical units and attend to injured employees.

Mail Handlers: Includes persons who move mail containers in mail processing centers.

City Delivery Carriers: Includes persons who deliver mail in urban and non-rural areas.

Motor Vehicle Operators: Includes persons who drive mail trucks.

Rural Delivery Carriers - Full-time: Includes persons who deliver mail in non-urban areas.

Special Delivery Messengers: Discontinued position that employed persons to make deliveries that required expedited delivery.

Building and Equipment Maintenance Personnel: Includes persons who maintain and repair USPS facilities.

Vehicle Maintenance Personnel: Includes persons who perform preventive maintenance and repair of USPS vehicles.

Non-career Employees

Casuals: Includes persons hired temporarily to assist USPS career employees in mail processing facilities.

Non-bargaining Temporary: Includes persons hired temporarily to perform administrative duties in USPS offices.

Rural Subs/RCA/RCR/AUX: Includes rural substitute carriers, rural carrier associates, rural carrier relief carriers, and auxiliary carriers, all of whom provide temporary assistance to USPS in the delivery of mail in non-urban areas.

Postmaster Relief/Leave Replacements: Includes persons who serve temporarily as managers of retail postal facilities.

Transitional Employees: Includes persons who staff USPS's Remote Encoding Centers (RECs), which provide assistance to mail processing machines.[7]

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[7] If a mail processing machine cannot read an address, it makes an electronic image of the mail piece and transmits the image to a computer at an REC. There an employee attempts to determine the correct address for the mail piece so that it may be reentered into the mail processing stream.