

Ricin threats cause concern

Five letters suspected of containing the poison ricin entered the mail stream in May, prompting the Postal Service to hold a number of stand-up talks on employee safety.

Two letters, postmarked in Spokane and discovered on May 14, were addressed to the Spokane Post Office and to a federal judge in Spokane. Stand-up talks the following day stated that there was no reason to believe postal employees were at risk from handling the letters.

A second set of stand-up talks on May 22 disclosed the discovery of a third letter, also bearing a May 13 Spokane postmark, this one addressed to President Barack Obama.

KREM-TV reported that authorities had arrested Spokane resident Matthew Buquet, 37, on May 22 and charged him with at least one count of mailing a threatening communication.

The Postal Service held additional stand-up talks on May 28 after it was determined that two more letters suspected of containing ricin and bearing Shreveport, LA, postmarks had been mailed on May 20—one to New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg and one to his gun-control group in Washington. On June 7, police arrested 35-year-old Shannon Richardson of Texarkana, TX, in connection with this case.

According to the stand-up talks, the suspected substance was not in a form that could be inhaled or otherwise ingested. Each talk also briefly outlined the symptoms of ricin infection and directed postal workers to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) web page, cdc.gov, for further information.

The letters in Spokane, which also reportedly contained physical threats, are being investigated by postal inspectors and the Federal Protective Service.

All five letters are undergoing further forensic tests, and inspectors are keeping an eye out for any additional letters.

NALC members who have further questions may call Director of Safety and Health Manuel L. Peralta Jr. at NALC Headquarters in Washington, DC. **PR**

Politics threatens NLRB

The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pension Committee voted on May 22 to send to the Senate floor a bloc of five nominees to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB).

“But as is sadly commonplace in Washington, DC, partisan squabbling could scuttle the nominations process and severely threaten the NLRB’s ability to legally function,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said.

All five nominees must be confirmed before the end of August, if the board is to be able to function. When the term of one of the current NLRB members ends in August, the board would be without a legal quorum.

As this edition of *The Postal Record* went to press, no date had yet been set for such a confirmation vote.

“It’s imperative that the Senate move on this package of nominations now, so that the NLRB can continue its mission to protect workers’ rights,” Rolando said.

“All working people need and deserve a functioning NLRB,” Rolando said. “The Senate must act promptly to confirm the nominations, to remove any doubt about the Board’s authority to act and to restore stability to our system of labor-management relations.”

The package of NLRB nominees includes three Democrats and two Republicans. Traditionally, the party of the sitting president gets the majority of seats on the NLRB.

Senate confirmation of a bloc of nominees is not a new idea. In fact, in

the last 25 years, all but two of the 18 nominees confirmed to seats on the Board have been confirmed as part of such a package, and many had been serving as recess appointees when they were confirmed.

“But with 60-vote supermajority requirements now the norm,” Rolando said, “and with filibusters the rule rather than the exception, the traditionally ‘ordinary business’ of the Senate now is anything but ordinary.”

Three nominees are current Board members—Chairman Mark Pearce and members Sharon Block and Richard

Griffin—while two have not served previously on the Board and have been drawn from the ranks of attorneys who represent management in disputes with employees: Philip Miscimarra and Harry Johnson.

“It’s true that Johnson and Miscimarra hold views on labor relations matters that we do not agree with,” Rolando said. “However, working people need and deserve a functioning, stable NLRB; if the Senate confirms all five, the Board will once again achieve that stability.”

The week before the Senate committee vote, President Rolando asked members of the NALC e-Activist Network to tell their senators to approve the full bipartisan package quickly.

“I urge all of our members to keep calling both of their senators,” he said. “Let’s keep the pressure on to push the Senate to give working Americans the Board we deserve.” **PR**

