U.S. Postal Service
Washington, DC 20260-7200

A. Material Transmitted

This issuance of Handbook PO-413 is a complete revision. It replaces Transmittal Letter 1, dated April 8, 1987.

B. Explanation

This handbook provides information, policy, and procedures for the management of platform operations. It has been revised to correct minor errors and to update safety guidelines for using hampers.

C. Requisitions

To obtain copies of this handbook, submit Form 7380, *MDC Supply Requisition,* to your appropriate materiel distribution (supply) center.

D. Comments and Questions

1. Content. Address any comments or questions regarding the content of this directive to:

   OFFICE OF OPERATIONS METHODS AND SYSTEMS
   USPS HEADQUARTERS RM 7431
   475 L ENFANT PLAZA SW
   WASHINGTON DC 20260-7250

2. Clarity. Send any suggestions regarding this directive's organization or language to:

   DOCUMENT CONTROL DIVISION
   USPS HEADQUARTERS RM 2800
   475 L ENFANT PLAZA SW
   WASHINGTON DC 20260-1571

E. Effective Date

This material is effective upon receipt.

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Contents

Chapter 1
Overview

110 Introduction

This handbook is one of a series about mail processing operations that provides a logical pattern for reviewing and improving performance in our operations. The handbooks were developed for supervisors who are responsible for MODs Operations 210-229 (Loading and Unloading Platform Operations), 230-234 (Platform Operations-Miscellaneous), 235-237 (Manual Sack and Outside Sorting), and 238-239 (Mechanized Sack and Outside Sorting). While many of these handbooks are basic, they are designed to help supervisors audit, monitor, and analyze the mail processing activities in their facilities. Basic work methods of both craft employees and supervisors are heavily emphasized. This book provides first line supervisors with standard guidelines for their platform operations.

120 Scope

This handbook covers platform operations for all activities related to the input and dispatch of mail from the distribution process. It also covers inbound and outbound traffic of related mail handling equipment. More specifically, the activities covered are the following:

a. Loading and unloading of racks. outsides. and containers of mail on or off trucks at the platform; the handling of related empty equipment is also included.

b. Distribution of sacks on machines, sawtooths, platforms, slides, chutes, conveyors. multislides, and in bullpen operations.

c. Distribution of outside parcels when done on the platform.

Chapter 2
Managing Platform Operations

210 Management Awareness

211 Assessing Potential Savings

Indirect operations that have Labor Distribution Code (LDC) 14, such as platform activities, opening units, and mail preparation, account for approximately 56 percent of total mail processing workhours. The number of workhours in LDC 14 is increasing at a significantly greater rate than are distribution workhours. This growth rate indicates that significant potential savings are available in these areas. Several regional and national programs, such as the Work Credit System, have been initiated to help plan, measure, and control these operations. The best way to ensure that these workhours are productively spent, however, is for line supervisors to make sure that they understand the operation and have managerial control over the workload, personnel, and equipment needed for a well-run operation. This handbook will help supervisors to operate efficiently and safely by providing reminders and asking basic questions about the operations. "Self-audits" highlight the areas where improvements can readily be made. These areas include safety, work methods, control of mail and workhours, and equipment efficiency.

212 Measuring Productivity

The concept of measuring productivity on the platform is still somewhat foreign. Historically we have not measured the workload and therefore have not developed a system to measure platform productivity (workload/workhours). With the installation of the Work Credit System in all MOD 1 offices, we now have a means of measuring performance in the major indirect operations. By measuring productivity, establishing goals, and tracking performance trends, we can reduce workhours and capture the potential savings identified by the new system.

213 Controlling Nonproductive Time

It is necessary to start now to identify and control all unnecessary and nonproductive workhours. As line supervisors and floor managers, you can accomplish this through two basic actions:

a. Do not allow employees from another operation to be charged to your operation if you do not need them.

b. Make full use of MODs Operation 340, Stand-by Time, when you have exhausted the other means of reducing workhours (liberal leave policy and assignments to available work).

Note: These actions will provide you and your operation with the ability to increase productivity and to identify unnecessary workhours. In the past, the belief has been that the use of Stand-by Time indicates poor management, but this is not true. Like using overtime when the workload exceeds the normal staffing level, using Stand-by Time is an effective way of compensating for days with a lower than normal workload. Stand-by Time, when used correctly, is a valuable management tool. However, monitor the use of these hours regularly to track any trends.

220 Management Action

221 General

Management of indirect operations is not as structured as is the management of direct operations, such as using letter sorting machines (LSMs), optical character readers (OCRs), and bar code readers. Management of well-functioning platform operations, however, typically is highly structured.

222 Operating Plan

222.1 General. A well-structured platform operation must include a formal operating plan. This plan is the basis for the direction of platform operations at your facility. To develop this platform operating plan, you must consider the critical entry and dispatch requirements for the

facility with special attention to incoming mail, outgoing mail, staffing, and space management.

222.2 Incoming Mail. An overall profile of inbound mail must be provided in the operating plan. This profile should include the following:

a. An arrival profile for scheduled vehicular traffic, including an expectation of percentage of load.

b. A definition of usual trip contents (e.g., container types, sacks, etc.).

c. A less precise arrival profile for random traffic.

(1) How many vehicles?

(2) When are they expected?

d. An estimate of how many cubic feet of mail are expected.

222.3 Outgoing Mail. The operating plan must contain knowledge of regular mail dispatch by time and volume. This part of the plan answers the following questions:

a. How many trips? When?

b. What container types?

c. How many cubic feet of mail?

222.4 Staffing. The staffing portion of the operating plan contains knowledge of how many cubic feet of mail are expected, and when. A planning guideline in workhours per cubic foot may be used to rough out a staffing plan, which should provide answers to the following questions:

a. How many people are needed?

b. When are the people needed?

c. Where are more people obtained when urgently needed?

d. How are unneeded people handled? Are they reassigned elsewhere? Put on stand-by (Operation 340)? Or is liberal leave policy applied?

222.5 Space Management. Space planning and management are critical to a well-run platform operation. Casual control of dock space is a sign of less effective and/or less efficient operations. Do not use docks for storage or other operational activities that interfere with loading and unloading of trucks. Have a plan for where inbound and outbound mail is to go. The space

portion of the operating plan should contain answers to the following questions:

a. Where does inbound mail go after unloading?

b. Where does outbound mail await dispatch?

c. In what containers should the mail be placed?

d. What steps should be taken if the mail is in the wrong type of container all the time?

230 Management Control

231 Plan Deviations

Monitoring and controlling the operating plan outlined in 222 is essential. You must note deviations from the plan and apply corrective actions on the spot. It is imperative to assess changes in planned traffic (inbound or outbound) in terms of their effects on service, volume, space, and workforce and to develop and take suitable action promptly. For example, you might rearrange space allocations, obtain more (or fewer) people, and the like. Timely receipt and dispatch of mail are the keys to success in achieving the standards of service. The late arrival of mail (incoming and outgoing) at the dock requires immediate attention. When mail arrives late consistently, it is necessary to contact the appropriate transportation management and/or distribution process managers and expediters and act to make sure the plan is followed.

232 Employee Performance

Effective control also includes periodically assessing individual employee performance and, when necessary, taking corrective action immediately. Sound group performance is the sum of the performance of individuals. Individual performance is best when:

a. Time spent with the work task is maximized and time away from the workplace minimized; and

b. Employees know what is expected of them in terms of performance goals (i.e., cubic feet/hour, containers/hour. etc.).

240 Operations Checklists

241 Planning Checklist

Use the following checklist when planning dock operations:

a. Do the dock operations and duties assigned to particular personnel suit the mail loading/unloading task of the installation?

b. Are schedules of all inbound and outbound transportation up to date, posted, and visible to all platform employees? Are employees aware of the posted schedules and their location?

c. Do the outbound trip schedules correspond with the availability of mail?

d. Are departing trucks loaded with less than 50 percent of their capacity? If so, is Transportation Management Service Center (TMSC) action obtained? Are trucks consistently overloaded? Is TMSC action obtained?

e. Are all highway contract vehicles closed with numbered seals and Form 5398-A, *Contract Route Vehicle Record,* completed?

242 Staffing Checklist

Use the following checklist to gauge how well you manage your employees:

a. Do you control employees' arrival and prompt start of work? Do you meet personnel at the clock-in point? Control employees' clock-in? Promptly assign personnel?

b. Are personnel gainfully employed at all times?

c. Do you assign employees to alternate work locations during slack periods?

d. Do you check for personnel's prompt movement to the work locations to which they have been reassigned?

e. Is there appropriate control of smoking, drinking, and eating at the workplace? Does official policy on these matters exist? Is it posted? Is it communicated clearly?

f. Are there people other than Operation 210 staff on the dock? Who else is on the dock? Are they likely to create a disruption? Do they present a security risk?

243 Space Management Checklist

Use the following checklist to determine the platform's space requirements:

a. Are there enough dock spaces to handle transportation requirements?

b. Are unloading dock locations close to staging areas and next to operations?

c. Do dock assignments suit cross-docking requirements?

d. Do mail acceptance units compete for space with dock operations?

e. Is there sufficient coordination among mail acceptance personnel to ensure necessary segregation of mail?

f. Are staging areas adequate and clearly identified?

g. Is empty equipment stored in an orderly manner? Such equipment must not interfere with dock operations.

h. Are dock areas clean and uncluttered? Are there open areas to allow the unobstructed movement of equipment and mail?

i. Are schedules posted for arriving transportation? Are there adequate instructions for breakup and movement to proper next handling operations?

j. Are visual aids posted showing the dock locations for each trip and the separations/ZIP Codes that are expected to be loaded?

k. Are outbound loading schedules posted for mail being dispatched?

l. Does the mail for outbound loading arrive on the platform at the right time? Too early? Too late?

m. Do inbound/outbound dock operations back up at certain times of day? Why? Is corrective action taken?

n. Does equipment for platform storage back up at certain times of day? Why? Is corrective action taken?

244 Mail Management Checklist

Use the following checklist to gauge how well you currently manage mail flow:

a. Does mail arrive at the platform from distribution areas in the appropriate equipment?

b. Is preferential mail expedited during dock transfers?

c. Are all scheduled arrivals and departures monitored, and are reports on late arrivals and departures properly made (see POM 421.4 and 421.5)?

d. Is mail being processed on a first-in, first-out (FIFO) basis and in compliance with service commitments?

e. Is Form 5500, *Contract Route Irregularity Report,* being properly completed and followed up?

f. Is there appropriate control of perishables? Bees, chicks, insects, and similar items require special care.

g. Are Express Mail pouches handled properly?

h. Are Registered Mail dispatches handled properly?

i. Are customers allowed to use the same dock areas as Postal Service vehicles? If so, does this create a security problem?

j. Are ZIP Code checks made at slides, runouts, and sawtooth positions to ensure that the right mail gets to the right dispatch container?

k. Is the flow of mail from the dispatching unit to the platform smooth and timely? Can the platform support a working staging system for outgoing mail?

l. Are dispatch areas audited to make sure that only the proper mail is staged in each area?

m. Are ZIP Code checks made at loading to ensure that the right mail gets to the right outbound transportation?

245 Methods Management Checklist

Use the following checklist to determine if current management methods are effective:

a. Can any manual transport operations be mechanized?

b. Are enough separations being made when unloading a vehicle to reduce significantly subsequent handlings? Are too many separations being made? Too Few?

c. Are startups/shutdowns of the mechanized sack sorter, multislide, sawtooth, and bullpen operations staffed to minimize idle time? These are usually crew activities.

d. At mechanized sack sorters, are sack strings loose on transport trays? Loose strings often cause jams, pull-offs, etc.; they should be tucked in.

e. Is prompt action taken to clear backed-up runouts on mechanized sack sorters? This must be done promptly at the appearance of full-runout indicator lights.

f. Is there sufficient watch for overflow on mechanized sack sorters?

246 Auxiliary Equipment Management Checklist

Use the Following checklist to determine how well you manage auxiliary equipment:

a. Is there proper dock lighting to permit the accurate handling of mail?

b. Is proper equipment available (e.g., dock levelers, dock boards, Forklifts) to load and unload mail?

c. Is equipment in good repair? Is it fully functional? Is it safe?

247 Safety Management Checklist

Use the following checklist to determine whether you are running a safe operation:

a. Are bumper stops installed?

b. Are stairways to and from the dock well marked and in the right location? Are they used? (Jumping on or off the dock is prohibited.)

c. Are vehicle wheels chocked?

d. Are dock plates, lifts, or ramps available? Are they being utilized?

e. Do employees consistently lift and handle heavy sacks and parcels properly? (See chapter 3.)

f. Do employees consistently seek help when loading or unloading heavy mail into or out of containers, vans, etc.?

g. Do employees always check dock boards and levelers to see that they are in good working condition and securely in place?

h. Is the load capacity of dock boards being exceeded?

i. Is the dock area free of unwanted materials, such as pieces of broken wood, empty pallets, cardboard, etc.?

j. Is the platform mail handling equipment in good working condition?

k. Has damaged equipment been "red tagged" using Form 4707, *Out of Order,* and removed from the dock area?

l. Is horseplay prohibited in and around the dock area?

m. Is the dock floor in good condition (free of holes, high spots, low spots, etc.)?

n. Do employees push, not pull, containers except during unloading? Do they handle one container at a time?

o. Is mechanical equipment guarded at end points, corners, around belts, etc.?

p. Do employees consistently comply with safety regulations about clothing, jewelry, etc.? Employees must not be allowed to wear jewelry, loose clothing, etc., while working at/around machinery. (See chapter 3, subchapter 330.)

q. Are unsafe acts/conditions reported?

Chapter 3
Personnel Safety Guidelines

310 Proper Lifting

311 Instruction and Follow-Up

Incorrect manual lifting can cause hernias and serious lower back injuries. Employees who have not been told otherwise may not know there is a correct (that is, safe and efficient) way to lift. They must not only be told how to lift properly; they   be taught how to do it. Supervisors should follow up on initial instructions to make certain that staff members continuously use correct lifting techniques.

312 Correct Body Position

312.1 Mechanics of Lifting. The mechanics of lifting are fairly simple. When someone lifts a weight held out from the body, the back acts like a lever. When this principle operates in a person's lifting, however, the lever's advantage becomes a disadvantage because its hinge is located at a relatively weak point in the human body. This increases the actual workload or strain placed on the hinge point of the lever--in this case, the lower back or the groin (see Exhibit 312.1a). If the weight is lifted correctly, the back no longer serves as a horizontal lever and much less force is exerted on the back. The existing leverage is transferred to the legs. The leg muscles are much stronger than those of the lower back (see Exhibit 312.1b).

312.2 Examples. You can easily demonstrate this principle with any object weighing several pounds. Have an employee hold a hand under the object, holding it close to the chest. This position

is comfortable, and the object can be held that way for a long time without undue strain (see Exhibit 312.2a). Next have the employee hold the same object at arm's length for a while (see Exhibit 312.2b). The arm is the lever acting at a disadvantage. Considerably more effort must be exerted to hold the same weight with the arm extended away from the body. Lifting incorrectly, as shown in Exhibit 312.1a, places extra strain on the back. Exhibits 312.2c and 312.2d contrast the amount of effort used to lift a 4-pound weight in both the correct (Exhibit 312.2c) and incorrect (Exhibit 312.2d) positions. In the correct position, about 4 pounds of effort is exerted. In the incorrect position, the back acts as a level and about 20 pounds of effort must be exerted to lift the same object. Therefore, one of the basic rules in correct lifting is to keep the object being lifted close to the body. The starting position for correct lifting is to bend the knees and keep the back nearly vertical.

312.3 Awkward Positions. Never allow employees to lift anything or otherwise exert a strong force on the body while in an awkward position. They are much more vulnerable to injury from strain, even in lifting a relatively light load, when the body is twisted or off balance. Using a pinch bar and similar activities can all result in serious strain and injury when done while the lifter's body is twisted. Where lifting must be done in crowded quarters, clear the area sufficiently to lift correctly.
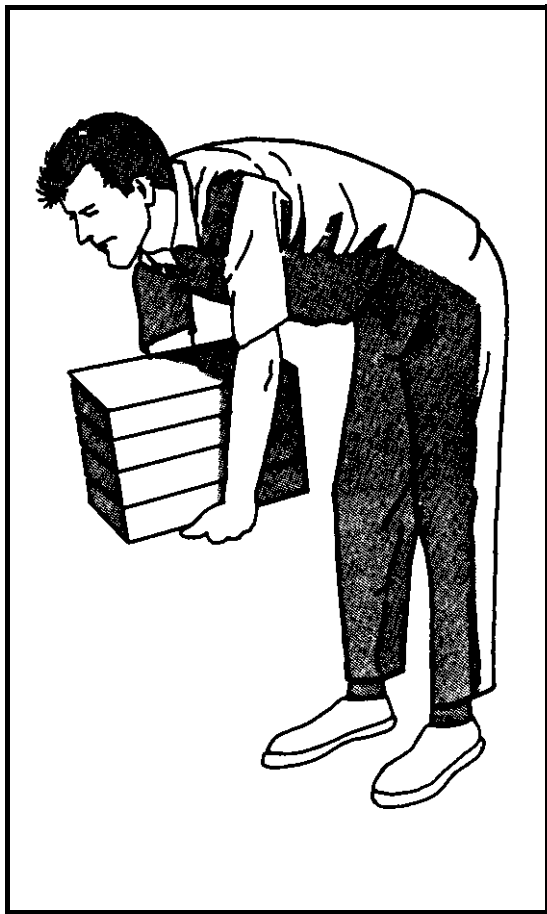
Exhibit 312.1a

Platform Operations

Exhibit 312.1a
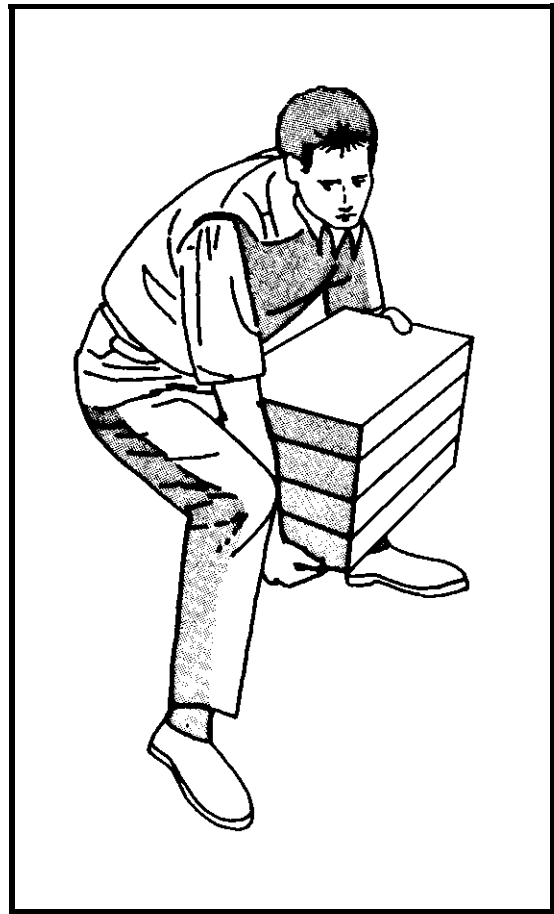**This is the wrong position for lifting.**

Exhibit 312.1b
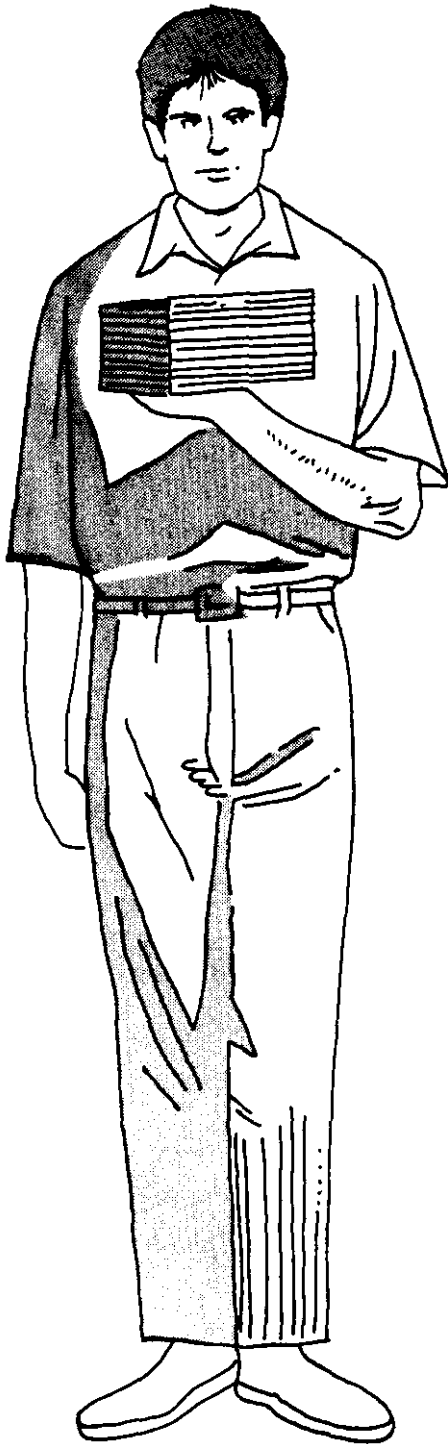**This is the right position for lifting.**

Exhibit 312.2a
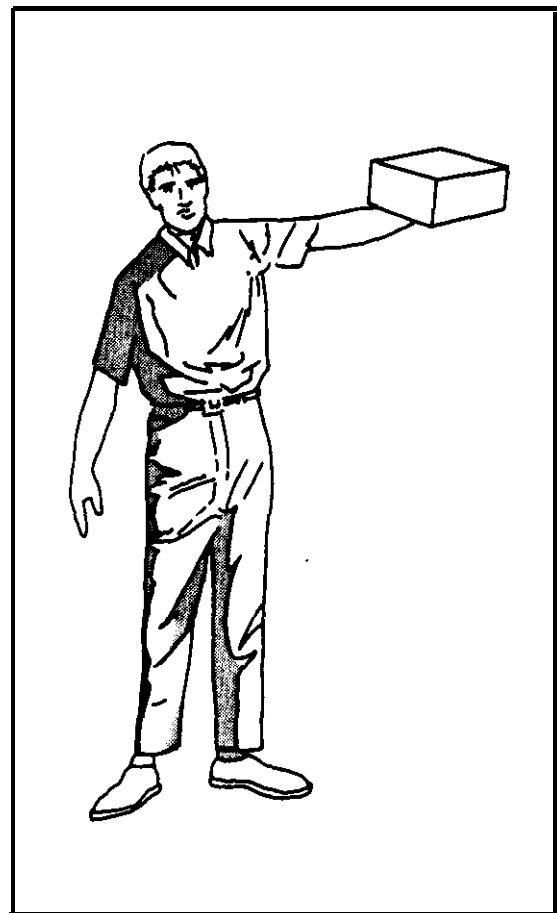**This is an example of holding**
a parcel close to the body.

Exhibit 312.2b
This is an example of holding
a parcel away from the body.

Exhibit 312.2c   **Platform Operations**
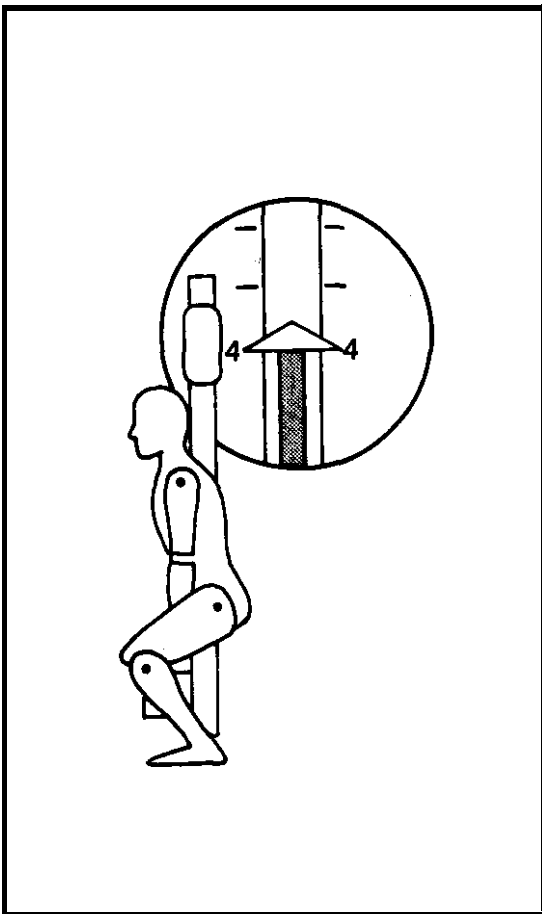
Exhibit 312.2c
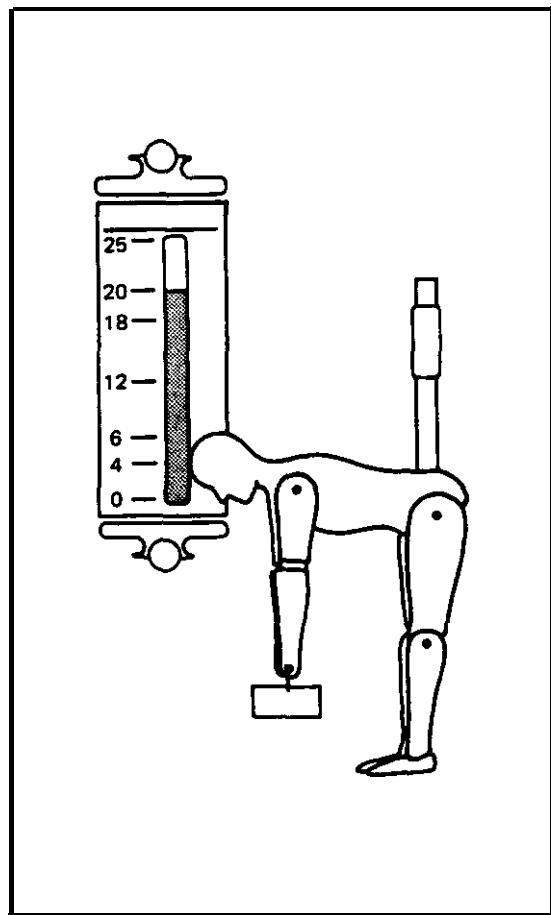**This is the right way to lift.**

Exhibit 312.2d
This is the wrong way to lift.

313 Use of Hampers

The risk of injury is great when improperly load-ing or unloading hampers. Because of the height of both the 1046 and 1033 hamper, it is necessary for employees to bend at the waist without bend-ing their knees when manually unloading (see Exhibit 313a). When this is necessary, empty only half the hamper, then tip the hamper over to unload the rest (see Exhibit 313b). Do not place heavy objects in hampers since they cannot be properly lifted out. Instead, place heavy objects on flatbed trucks. Consider using mechanized hamper dumpers, lifts, and other equipment as means of increasing personnel safety. Parcels with shifting weights present special problems since they must be turned over or on end to get a firm grip. See 314 for guidelines on controlling such loads. Employees who question their ability to remove an object from a hamper should get help. Personnel who work with hampers often should check the hampers and identify and remove damaged hampers from service. Reference Hand-book PO-502, *Container Methods,* and Handbook EL-801, *Supervisor's Safety Handbook.* for other authorized and unauthorized uses for hampers.

314 Control of Loads

Losing control of a load, through losing one's grip or experiencing an unexpected shift of the contents, can be a dangerous situation. Instruct staff in such circumstances to jump clear of the load and, if possible, let it go or ride it to the floor using their weight, keeping hands and feet clear. Employees in this situation must strive first to avoid injury; concern for dropping the object must be secondary.

315 Summary

A summary of rules for correct lifting techniques follows:

a. Keep the load close to the body.

b. Bend the knees and keep the back straight.

c. Keep evenly balanced: don't lift in an awkward position. To change directions, lift the object to a carrying position, then turn the body while repositioning the feet. Always make sure that the path of travel is unobstructed and that you have a clear view over the load.

d. Be sure of good footing. Place your feet one slightly ahead of the other and far enough apart to provide good balance and stability. Do not make lifts on slippery, sloping, or cluttered floors. When it is necessary to make high lifts, spot in advance the exact place where the load is to be placed.

e. Lift steadily and smoothly. Making sudden movements with even a light weight can strain the body.

f. Get help in lifting heavy objects.

g. Pick up loads by holding them at opposite corners.

h. Do not fight to recover a dropping object.

320 Handling Parcel Post

Pick up wooden crates and heavy cartons by holding them at diagonally opposite corners. Avoid placing both hands on the bottom of the carton, since the burden cannot then be set down without either shifting the load or mashing your fingers. Get help when lifting heavy objects. No exact weight can be listed as the maximum for all employees because of differences in people's size, strength, and build. Most people, however, have a pretty good idea from how a load "feels" of whether or not it will be a strain for them to handle alone. Instruct employees to ask for assis-tance when they feel an object is too heavy. Give such instruction considerately so that employees will not feel they are being ridiculed for seeking help.

Exhibit 313a
This is the wrong way to remove packages from a hamper. Employees cannot lift in this position
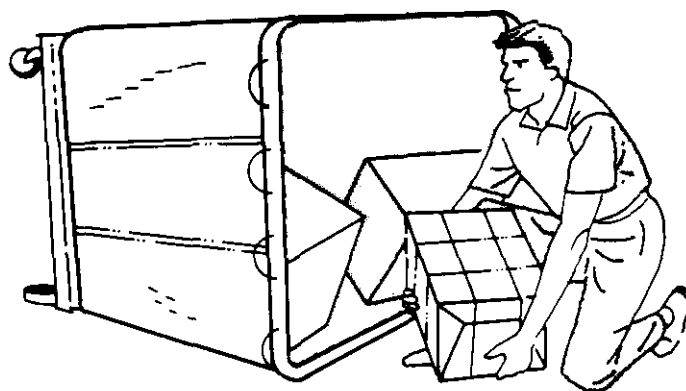without straining the back.

Exhibit 313b
This is the correct way to remove packages from a hamper.

330 Jewelry and Clothing Guidelines

331 Jewelry Dangers

People working around moving machinery parts must never wear jewelry, including necklaces, neck chains, earrings, bracelets, watches, and rings. (See Handbook EL-801, *Supervisor's Safety Handbook.)*

332 Safe Clothing

Supervisors must ensure that personnel working around moving machinery parts do wear snugly fitting clothing, but do not wear neckties, scarves, or jewelry, including rings. All employees must wear comfortable, safe, and sensible footwear that is in good condition and appropriate for the job. Widely flared pants, full dresses or skirts, and loose, full, or flared sleeves on shirts and blouses can be hazardous since the clothing may come in contact with machinery, vehicles, or moving equipment and get caught. Consequently, permit such clothing only when these hazards do not exist. (See Handbook EL-801, *Supervisor's Safety Handbook.)*

Chapter 4
Common Causes of Low Productivity

In general, insufficient planning by supervisors causes low productivity-- failing to keep ahead of all operations by hour or by day--and overstaffing. More specifically, supervisors may cause low productivity by doing the following:

a. Fail to know what is expected of employees and fail to let each of them know.

b. Fail to take appropriate action when employees do not produce at a fair and reasonable rate.

c. Delay in shifting employees to other duties when the volume of work slackens or ends.

d. Assign employees before the volume of work warrants their use.

e. Permit excessive talking that distracts other workers.

f. Fail to give all required instructions to employees and to take the action necessary to see that the instructions are followed at all times.

g. Fail to see that cases, racks, etc., are properly and legibly labeled.

h. Fail to assign employees to duties for which they are qualified. (Supervisors must not use this as an excuse for failure to train employees.)

i. Fail to make sure that shifting employees is restricted to an absolute minimum.

j. Fail to see that mail is brought into the work center in the correct container.

k. Fail to forecast workloads and workforce needs accurately.

l. Fail to see that employees take up their work promptly upon reporting to work and returning from lunch or breaks.

m. Permit excessive or unnecessary "wash-up" time prior to the lunch period and at the end of the tour.

n. Fail to keep sufficient, proper equipment in ideal working order prior to assignment of a crew or the arrival of mail.

o. Permit excessive absences from the assignment for personal reasons.

p. Use workers excessively on indirect operations.

q. Unnecessarily assign employees charged into production operations to nonproductive duties (e.g., record keeping, window services, housekeeping, moving supplies).

r. Fail to maintain the working area in a safe and orderly condition--housekeeping. (Supervisors should see to it that empty and surplus equipment is kept off the workroom floor, that a storage area is established, that hampers are stacked.)

s. Fail to take immediate corrective action upon receiving improperly prepared mail from intermediate processing operations. (This invites recurrence and unplanned use of workhours.)

Chapter 5
Monitoring Mail Transport Equipment at Terminal Operations

510 General Vehicle Inspection

Dock clerks and mailhandlers must inspect all vehicles to make sure they meet the following conditions:

a. The cargo compartment is waterproof except for proper ventilation.

b. The compartment is clean and devoid of anything that might injure the mail.

c. Doors are equipped with locking devices and acceptable locks.

d. The cargo compartment meets the contract-stated cubic foot capacity or is able to carry all available mail.

e. Each vehicle to be operated is licensed to carry the maximum weight allowed by law for its type.

f. Vehicles have sufficient motive power to maintain the legal speed limit with a maximum load.

g. Load dividers and interior lighting is available when required by contract provisions.

h. Vehicles are spotted at the proper bay.

i. Vehicles comply with motor vehicle regulations.

j. Container-carrying vehicles are equipped with "E track" and shoring bars.

520 Outbound Vehicle Inspection

Dock clerks and mailhandlers must inspect vehicles before they leave the terminal. Follow these steps when performing outbound vehicle inspections:

a. Inspect each vehicle completely before loading.

b. Present available mail to contractor for loading, and arrange loading assistance when required.

c. Schedule loading for maximum efficiency when vehicles are preloaded by Postal Service employees.

d. Monitor all loading, including contractor loading, to ensure good loading habits for maximum space utilization.

e. Periodically check loading for proper routing and separation.

f. Determine that all connections are loaded prior to departure.

g. Determine the load factor visually--with due regard for poor piling, low loading, or honeycombing.

h. Determine that container loads are securely restrained by shoring bars.

i. See that vehicles are properly locked on departure. Vehicles in the security seal program must be properly sealed and recorded.

j. Record all data on Form 5398, *Transportation Performance Record,* or Form 5398-A, *Contract Route Vehicle Record,* when irregularities occur.

530 Inbound Vehicle Inspection

Dock clerks and mailhandlers must inspect vehicles upon arrival at the terminal. The steps of inbound vehicle inspection follow:

a. Observe arrival to determine that vehicles are locked. Vehicles in the security seal program must be properly sealed and recorded.

b. Record actual arrival time, and consult with contractor for a report on the cause of any delays.

c. Make a visual check to see that container loads are properly restrained by shoring bars, and report all noncomplying offices.

d. Make a visual check of the load factor.

e. Make sure that all close connections are promptly unloaded and forwarded for dispatch.

f. Spot-check mail for delays or errors, and prepare reports on irregularities noted.

g. Spot-check vehicles after they have been unloaded for any deficiencies that need correction before the next trip.

h .   When irregularities occur, record all inbound data on Form 5398 and Form 5500, *Contract Route Irregularity Report.*