

Canada Post Ombudsman

2012 Annual Report



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Overview of Appeals to the Canada Post Ombudsman in 2012

During 2012, my office received a total of 6,482 appeals of which 2,720 were investigated. My role as ombudsman is to act as a final appeal for customers unable to obtain a satisfactory resolution directly with Canada Post. The resulting investigations are conducted in a fair and unbiased manner in order to assess the merits of the complaints and to mediate appropriate resolutions. Through periodic reports, I provide recommendations to Canada Post to highlight potential service improvements. I also report specifically on appeals pertaining to the *Canadian Postal Service Charter*. I personally oversee each investigation and approve every outcome which can include corrective measures to improve compliance to procedures, the award of financial compensation or provide an explanation when an appeal lacks in merit.

Over the course of an investigation, my office will examine relevant policies, procedures, the *Canada Post Corporation Act* and *Regulations*, conduct enquiries with Canada Post management, review supporting documentation and mediate a resolution when warranted.

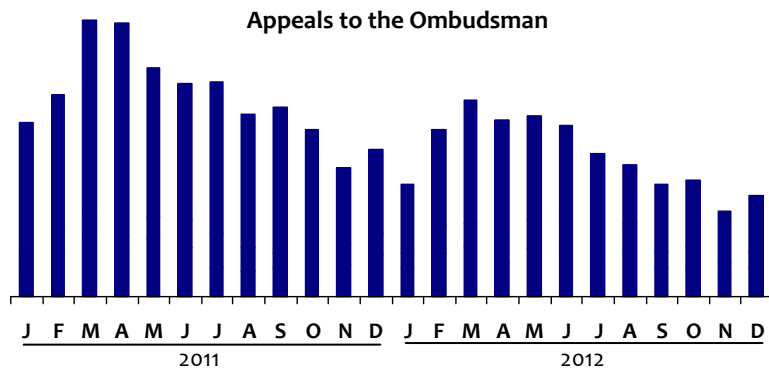
WHAT THE OMBUDSMAN CAN DO

- The ombudsman independently investigates appeals in a fair, unbiased and confidential manner.
- The ombudsman relies on a fact-based investigation process in order to assess if Canada Post reasonably applied its policies and procedures in the initial handling of a complaint.
- After a thorough investigation, if an appeal requires corrective action, the ombudsman mediates a resolution between Canada Post and the customer.

WHAT THE OMBUDSMAN DOES NOT DO

- The ombudsman does not become involved in matters that relate to employee or supplier relations, Canada Post's subsidiaries, postage rates, policy setting, compliance to legislation or matters that are before the courts.

The number of appeals was down 29% in 2012 as a result of significant improvements made by Canada Post in the areas of on-time delivery, redirection, security of the mail and access to Customer Service using their website. Almost two-thirds of the appeals required and resulted in corrective action by Canada Post while the remaining appeals were found to be without merit.



Top Appeals Investigated

Not all appeals to my office result in an investigation. When customers have not previously addressed their complaint to Canada Post, they are asked to do so before seeking my assistance. My office will not investigate when customers cannot provide sufficient information or withdraw their appeal.

It is important to note that the top issues investigated by my office do not necessarily reflect the top issues at Canada Post. By virtue of the process, customers with chronic issues or incidents of significant loss appeal to my office for assistance.

The most significant issues investigated in 2012 involved the loss or theft of goods or documents while in the course of post or immediately after delivery. While it is critical that Canada Post continually work to minimize the instances of loss or theft, in most cases the impact of these incidents could have been greatly mitigated by purchasing insurance coverage at the time of mailing. Unfortunately, my investigations have revealed that retail postal clerks do not always offer this service option or, are not fully knowledgeable about the restrictions. For example, Canada Post offers, for a fee, up to \$500 of coverage to duplicate identity documents or re-issue airline tickets but we found that many clerks were not aware of this option. Additionally, for those customers purchasing the maximum coverage for documents, the \$500 coverage is not necessarily enough to cover the costs to duplicate all the documents particularly when these involve immigration documents, visas, etc.

Another area with a significant gap in knowledge pertains to the acceptance of electronic devices containing lithium batteries. When transporting by air, senders and carriers must do so in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations. In 2012, lithium batteries, designated as dangerous goods under the *Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act, Class 9 – Miscellaneous*, could only be shipped in Canada using surface services (e.g. *Regular* or *Expedited Parcels*). Unfortunately, I investigated many appeals involving such devices sent to U.S. or international destinations that were never delivered. In some cases, the devices were seized because of the dangerous good content but the high value of electronics also made them vulnerable to theft. While customers are responsible to comply with the *Dangerous Goods Act*, retail postal clerks aware of the content, should not accept them for shipping.

My office recommended to Canada Post that communication be re-issued to retail postal outlets on these two important topics and I will continue to monitor over the coming months to assess its effectiveness.

To contribute to the prevention of loss or theft, my office provides data to Canada Post's Security and Investigations team who analyzes the network for potential threats and takes corrective measures. I have identified two areas of improvement for Canada Post that would contribute to reducing instances of loss or theft after delivery. The first occurs when a delivery agent does not verify that all the mail or parcels were properly sorted at the point of delivery. An incorrect delivery potentially puts a customer's confidential information or goods at risk and unfortunately, not all unintended recipients return the items to Canada Post or to the rightful owner.

The second area for improvement pertains to Canada Post procedures that allow for the unattended delivery of parcels that do not require personal contact such as the collection of a signature, verification of identity or age, etc. This practice is only acceptable when the resulting delivery will not expose the package to passers-by or to weather elements. While damage to the item can result if exposed to rain, it can also be stolen if visible from the street. During the course of my investigations, I noted that the procedure is not always respected leaving visible parcels or documents vulnerable to theft.

My office followed-up with the offending delivery offices to ensure that proper procedures were reviewed with delivery staff.

Canadian Postal Service Charter

In 2009, the Government of Canada established the *Canadian Postal Service Charter* to describe its expectations regarding Canada Post's service standards and related postal activities. My office provides Canada Post data to identify areas of improvement specifically relating to the *Charter* and the 1,780 such appeals investigated represented a 67% decline over the previous year. The top issue in 2012 involved the expectation that "Canada Post will provide an extensive network for accessing postal services that includes retail postal outlets, stamp shops and street letterboxes, as well as access to information and customer service through the Canada Post's website and call centres." I investigated 909 appeals falling in this category over the year although the vast majority involved customers frustrated by their inability to complain directly to Canada Post using online tools. While many such complaints still come to my office, improvements to Canada Post's Customer Service Call Centres and to its website resulted in a 78% reduction in volume over 2011.

The *Canadian Postal Service Charter* also dictates that "Canada Post will take into consideration the security and privacy of the mail in every aspect of mail collection, transmission and delivery." I investigated 752, representing 37% fewer cases than in 2011, and most of the appeals dealt with loss or theft of mail or mail delivered to the incorrect address as noted above.

Recommendations

I issued five recommendations to Canada Post that would improve customer satisfaction:

1. Ensure delivery agents consistently verify the sort accuracy of mail prior to delivery.
2. Ensure parcels are delivered to a secure location which is not visible to passers-by.
3. Ensure retail clerks are knowledgeable about shipping restrictions for electronics containing lithium batteries.
4. Ensure retail clerks consistently offer coverage for loss or damage for all parcel services including documents.
5. Consider increasing the available coverage for documents to align with the maximum coverage currently available for other parcel services.

Closing

In closing, I would like to thank Canada Post for its ongoing cooperation and support during the course of my office's investigations.

This report was submitted to the Board of Directors of Canada Post on March 21, 2013.



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Canada Post Ombudsman