

# A Guide for American Postal Workers Union Members: Addressing Abusive Supervision in the USPS

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## Your Rights, Your Protection

This guide is for every American Postal Workers Union (APWU) member facing abusive supervision within the United States Postal Service (USPS). Our aim is to empower you by clearly outlining your rights, providing practical steps, and highlighting the specific language in contracts, manuals, and policies that safeguard you.

You are never alone. Established procedures and protections already exist to ensure a respectful and safe workplace. The APWU is deeply committed to upholding your dignity and will stand with you against any form of mistreatment.

**Disclaimer:** This guide offers general information and references only. It's not a substitute for legal advice or direct consultation with your APWU Local or National representatives. Always seek guidance from your union stewards, officers, or lawyers for specific situations. Every case is unique, and your union representative is best equipped to advise on the most effective course of action for your particular circumstances.

## Understanding Abusive Supervision: What It Is and Isn't

Abusive supervision can manifest in various ways, from overt harassment to subtle, consistent undermining. It's crucial to discern between legitimate supervisory actions—such as providing performance feedback, assigning tasks, or issuing justified discipline—and conduct that crosses the line into abuse. When a supervisor's actions create a hostile work environment or infringe upon your rights, that is abuse.

Common examples of abusive behavior include:

- **Verbal Abuse:** This encompasses yelling, screaming, demeaning language, insults, name-calling, public shaming, profanity directed at you, or persistent sarcastic remarks intended to belittle.
- **Intimidation or Threats:** Be alert for threats of reprisal, job loss, or unwarranted disciplinary action. Abusers might foster a hostile environment through implied threats, aggressive body language, or by intentionally making you feel unsafe.



- **Harassment (Non-Sexual/Non-Discriminatory):** This can involve constant criticism, nitpicking, excessive monitoring (beyond reasonable job requirements), undermining your efforts, spreading rumors, isolating you from colleagues, or assigning unusually burdensome tasks not given to others.
- **Manipulation:** This refers to playing mind games, gaslighting (making you question your sanity or memory), issuing conflicting or unclear instructions, setting employees up for failure, or exploiting your personal vulnerabilities.
- **Disregard for Safety and Well-being:** Abusive supervisors might ignore legitimate safety concerns, pressure employees to work unsafely, deny scheduled breaks or leave without a valid reason, or compel employees to work excessive hours that negatively impact their health.
- **Personal Attacks:** This means commenting on your appearance, family, or non-work-related issues in a derogatory manner, mocking personal traits, or aggressively invading your personal space.
- **Targeting or Discrimination (beyond protected classes):** If a supervisor singles you out without legitimate justification, treats you differently or more harshly than others in similar situations, or displays unfair favoritism, that is a form of abuse.

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## Key USPS Policies and Manuals: Your Foundational Protection

The USPS has established policies and procedures to ensure a respectful and productive work environment for all. Familiarity with these documents is paramount, as a supervisor's violation of them provides grounds for a grievance.

### The Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM)

The ELM is a core document outlining personnel policies and practices.

- **ELM 665.16, "Personal Conduct":** This section broadly addresses the expected conduct for all postal employees, including supervisors. While it doesn't specifically target supervisory abuse, it sets a clear standard for professionalism and integrity. In essence: All employees, including managers, are expected to act professionally and avoid misconduct. Abusive behavior is clearly misconduct. You can often find the ELM online via the USPS internal network (**LiteBlue**) or through your union local.
- **ELM 665.24, "Relationship with Public and Other Employees":** This section is vital for understanding how employees, including supervisors, should interact. It strongly emphasizes courtesy and respect. Simply put: Everyone at the Post Office, including supervisors, must treat each other with respect and courtesy. This directly contradicts any abusive, intimidating, or harassing behavior. This section is available in the same locations as ELM 665.16.
- **ELM Chapter 667, "Disciplinary and Corrective Actions":** While this chapter generally deals with employee discipline, it implicitly applies to supervisors who engage in misconduct. Essentially: Just as employees can be disciplined for misconduct, so too can supervisors. Abusive behavior is misconduct warranting supervisory disciplinary action. This chapter is accessible in the same places as other ELM sections.

### The Administrative Support Manual (ASM)

The ASM provides policies and procedures for administrative functions. While less directly focused on employee conduct, it may contain relevant sections on the workplace environment. **Applicability:** Depending on its version, specific sections on workplace conduct, safety, or office management might exist. Your union representative can help you navigate this. In short: The ASM supports the overall functioning of the USPS, including maintaining a proper and safe work environment. Any supervisor actions that disrupt this can be challenged.



## USPS Policy on Workplace Harassment (Publication 553 and 552)

This standalone policy is incredibly significant. The USPS maintains a **zero-tolerance policy for harassment**. You'll often see it posted in facilities, available on **LiteBlue**, and accessible through your union. Specifically, seek **Publication 553, "Employee's Guide to Understanding, Preventing, and Reporting Harassment,"** and **Publication 552, "Manager's Guide to Understanding, Investigating, and Preventing Harassment."**

This policy unequivocally prohibits **all forms of harassment**, including non-discriminatory harassment like bullying, intimidation, or demeaning behavior. It typically outlines a clear reporting procedure. Crucially, harassment doesn't need to be illegal (e.g., based on race or sex) to be wrong and a violation of USPS policy.

- **Employee Responsibilities:** Your responsibility is to report harassment when it occurs.
- **Management Responsibilities:** Management is responsible for preventing harassment, taking immediate action upon its report, and ensuring a respectful workplace. Failure by management to act on reported harassment can become a serious issue for them, potentially leading to disciplinary action against the supervisor and even the Postmaster.

Simply put: The Post Office has a zero-tolerance policy for harassment. This means supervisors absolutely cannot harass you, verbally or otherwise. This policy also provides a clear reporting mechanism and defines management's duty to stop it.

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## Contractual Language and Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs): Your Most Powerful Tools

The National Agreement between the APWU and the USPS is your most potent tool; it is a binding contract that protects your rights.

### Article 14: Safety and Health

This article is paramount for addressing unsafe working conditions and, by extension, harassment that creates an unsafe or unhealthy work environment.

- **Article 14.1, "Principles":** This states that "The Employer shall provide and maintain a safe, healthful, and sanitary working environment." This extends beyond physical hazards to psychological safety and a healthy work atmosphere. In plain terms: The USPS has a fundamental responsibility to ensure your workplace is not only physically safe but also mentally and emotionally secure. Abusive supervision unequivocally violates this contractual obligation. The National Agreement is available at your union local or on the APWU website.
- **Article 14.2, "Cooperation":** This emphasizes collaboration between the Union and Management on safety matters. Essentially: The Union and Management are expected to work together to maintain a safe workplace. This implies management should be receptive to union concerns about abusive supervision.
- **Article 14.3, "Employee Rights":** This grants employees the right to report unsafe conditions and clearly states that "No employee shall be required to work under unsafe conditions." In short: You have the right to speak up if something is unsafe, and that absolutely includes harassment and abusive behavior that creates a psychologically unsafe environment. You cannot be forced to endure such conditions.
- **Article 14.4, "Safety and Health Committees":** These committees can serve as a venue to raise systemic issues of abusive supervision affecting the work environment. Put simply: Committees exist at various levels where safety issues, including harassment and workplace stress caused by supervision, can be discussed and addressed.

## Article 15: Grievance-Arbitration Procedure

This is the formal process for enforcing your contractual rights.

- **Article 15.1, "Definition":** This defines a **grievance** as a dispute over the interpretation, application, or compliance with the Agreement's provisions. Abusive supervision can be grieved if it violates contractual articles, such as Article 14, or even Article 19 regarding Handbook/Manual compliance. In simple terms: If management breaks the contract, you can file a grievance. Abusive supervision often constitutes a contract violation.
- **Steps of the Grievance Procedure:** Understanding the steps—informal, Step 1, Step 2, and Step 3/Arbitration—is important. Your steward will guide you through this entire process. Plainly: A formal process exists to challenge management's actions, and your union steward is there to support you every step of the way, ensuring your rights are protected.

## Article 17: Representation

This article outlines the rights and responsibilities of union stewards and management's obligations to provide stewards with necessary information and time to perform their duties.

- **Article 17.3, "Rights of Stewards":** This section ensures your stewards have the right to investigate and adjust grievances, interview employees and supervisors, and access relevant documents. In simple terms: Your steward has the right to fully investigate your complaint of abusive supervision, including speaking with you, other employees, and even the supervisor in question. Management must permit them to do so while on the clock.
- **Article 17.4, "Payment of Stewards":** Stewards are compensated for time spent handling grievances. Simply put: Your steward is paid by the USPS to represent you, ensuring they can dedicate the necessary time to your case without personal financial burden.

## Article 19: Handbooks and Manuals

This article stipulates that Handbooks and Manuals, such as the ELM and ASM, are part of the Agreement, provided they don't contradict it. In simple terms: Policies in manuals like the ELM and ASM, along with the USPS Policy on Workplace Harassment, are essentially part of your contract. Management is bound by them. If a supervisor violates a policy in the ELM (e.g., professionalism) or the Harassment Policy, you can grieve it as an Article 19 violation.

## Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs)

MOUs are agreements negotiated between the APWU and USPS, often clarifying or supplementing the National Agreement. Some MOUs might specifically address workplace conduct, harassment, or issues like stress. To find them: Your APWU Local will have copies of relevant MOUs. In essence: These are special agreements that also possess the force of the contract. Some may directly address harassment, the workplace environment, or stress, offering additional avenues to challenge abusive supervision.



# Taking Action: Practical Steps

When you experience abusive supervision, taking specific, well-documented steps is critical for your protection and for building a strong case.

## Document Everything

This is arguably the most crucial step. **Maintain a personal log off-site** – meaning not at work and not on USPS computers or devices. Use a physical notebook or a secure personal digital document. Include:

- **Date, Time, and Location:** Be precise about when and where each incident occurred.
- **Who was involved:** Note the supervisor's full name and the names of any witnesses (co-workers, customers, etc.). If possible, obtain their contact information if they are willing to provide it.
- **What happened:** Describe the incident factually, objectively, and in detail. Quote exact words if you can. Avoid emotional language; stick to observable facts. For instance: "On [Date] at [Time] in [Location], Supervisor [Name] yelled at me, stating, 'You're an idiot, and if you can't do this right, I'll find someone who can.' This happened in front of [Witness Name(s)]."
- **Impact:** How did it affect you? For example, did it cause emotional distress, make you feel unsafe, interfere with your work performance, lead to a significant delay, or cause an error?
- **Previous incidents:** Note any patterns of behavior or similar past occurrences. This helps establish a pattern of abuse rather than an isolated event.
- **Your actions:** Did you try to address it? Did you report it to anyone immediately? Did you seek medical attention for stress or anxiety?

## Speak to Your Steward Immediately

Your APWU steward is your primary point of contact and advocate. They are trained to handle these situations and serve as your best first resource. They can:

- Advise you on your rights and the grievance process.
- Represent you in discussions with management.
- Help you gather evidence and file grievances.
- Ensure management provides all relevant information to the union, as required by **Article 17** (Representation) and **Article 31** (Union Rights) of the National Agreement.

## Informal Resolution (Optional, but Sometimes Effective)

Sometimes, a direct, calm conversation (with your steward present) can resolve issues, especially if the supervisor is genuinely unaware of their behavior's impact. However, **never feel obligated to do this if you feel unsafe, if the abuse is severe, or if you believe it will escalate the situation or put you at further risk.** Your safety and well-being always come first. If you attempt informal resolution, ensure your steward is present and thoroughly document the conversation.

## Filing a Grievance

If informal resolution is not possible or ineffective, your steward will assist you in filing a formal grievance. This is your official union recourse. Grievances can be filed for various reasons:

- **Direct violation of the contract:** For example, a violation of **Article 14** (unsafe work environment due to harassment or intimidation).
- **Violation of an ELM/ASM policy (via Article 19):** For instance, a violation of **ELM 665.24** regarding respect and courtesy.



- **Violation of USPS Policy on Workplace Harassment (via Article 19):** This forms a strong basis for a grievance, as the policy explicitly prohibits abusive behavior regardless of whether it's tied to a protected class.
- **Violation of other MOUs:** If an MOU specifically addresses a type of behavior, it can be grieved.
- **"Letter of Warning for Unacceptable Conduct" (if applicable):** If a supervisor issues baseless discipline as a form of abuse or retaliation, this can and should be grieved. The grievance should argue that the discipline is unjust and itself an act of supervisory harassment.

## **Safety Forms: PS Form 1767, "Report of Hazard, Unsafe Condition or Practice"**

This form is not solely for physical hazards; it's also a powerful tool for psychological safety.

- **Applicability:** If a supervisor's behavior creates an unsafe working environment—such as severe stress, intimidation, distraction leading to errors, psychological distress, or a hostile environment—you can and absolutely should file a **PS Form 1767**.
- **Availability:** These forms are usually available at postal facilities, often near safety bulletin boards, or your steward can provide one.
- **In brief:** If your supervisor's actions render the workplace unsafe, even mentally or emotionally, you can use this form to report it. Management **must** respond to a 1767.
- **Process:** Complete the form clearly. Describe the "unsafe condition or practice" (the supervisor's specific abusive behavior) and explain how it makes the workplace unsafe for you or others. Give it to your supervisor (and ensure you keep a copy for yourself and your steward!). They are required to investigate and respond in writing within a specific timeframe. If they fail to respond, or if their response is unsatisfactory, immediately inform your steward. This non-response or unsatisfactory response can then become another grievance.

## **When to Contact Public Officials and Specific Situations**

Knowing when to escalate beyond internal USPS channels is critical, particularly for severe or criminal behavior.

### **Violence and Threatening Behavior**

If you feel physically threatened, fear for your immediate safety, or witness an act of physical violence or a direct threat of violence, **remove yourself from the situation immediately if at all possible**.

- **Call 911 (Emergency Services):** In cases of active physical assault, a credible threat of immediate physical harm, or involvement of a weapon, **call 911 first**. This is for your safety and the safety of everyone around you.
- **Call Postal Inspection Service (USPIS): 1-877-876-2455 (Criminal Investigations Service Center):** Contact the USPIS for threats, physical violence, or any criminal activity occurring on postal property or involving postal employees in their official capacity. The USPIS investigates assaults, threats, and other crimes.
- **Inform Management (if safe to do so) and Your Steward:** After ensuring your immediate safety, inform management and your union steward as soon as you possibly can.

The USPS enforces a **zero-tolerance policy for violence and threats**. This policy is usually communicated via standalone documents and is often referenced in the ELM. In summary: Any threat or act of violence is taken very seriously. Report it immediately to your union, management (if safe), and law enforcement or Postal Inspectors.

**Documentation** is absolutely crucial for any legal or disciplinary action. Include every detail: the nature of the threat, exact words, actions, the date, time, location, and any witnesses.



## Personal Assaults (Verbal, Psychological, or Physical)

- **Verbal or Psychological:** Document these incidents meticulously, report them to your steward, and grieve. This behavior falls under harassment and creates a hostile work environment. While typically not a police matter unless it involves credible threats, it's a serious workplace policy violation.
- **Physical:** Refer to the guidance under "Violence and/or Threatening Behavior" above. **Absolutely do not tolerate physical assault.** Any unwanted physical contact, pushing, grabbing, or hitting should be reported to 911 (if it's an emergency or constitutes a crime) and the Postal Inspection Service immediately.

## Private or Public Damage on Postal Property Towards Someone

This is a specific form of harassment or vandalism that can also be considered a criminal act.

- **Applicability:** If a supervisor damages your personal property (like your locker or personal items) or postal property in a way that specifically targets you, it's a serious matter.
- **Action:**
  - **Document:** Take photos of the damage immediately.
  - **Report to your steward:** Inform them of the incident right away.
  - **Report to Management:** Inform your supervisor (or their supervisor if they are the perpetrator) and ensure an official report is made.
  - **Postal Inspection Service:** If it involves property damage or threats, report it to the Postal Inspection Service at **1-877-876-2455**. This can also lead to criminal charges, depending on the severity and intent.
  - **Police:** For significant property damage, vandalism, or theft that you believe constitutes a local crime, you can also consider calling local police.

## Disturbing an Employee While Working

- **Applicability:** Excessive monitoring, constant interruptions without a legitimate reason, or intentionally distracting an employee to impede their work can all be forms of harassment. This also interferes with efficient postal operations.
- **Action:** Document the frequency and nature of these disturbances, how they impact your work, and any witnesses. Report it to your steward. This can be grieved as creating an unproductive or hostile work environment, and potentially a violation of management's duty to maintain efficient operations.

## Paramedics or Other Medical Professionals

- **When necessary:** If the abusive or harassing behavior causes you to experience acute physical symptoms that require immediate medical attention—such as a panic attack, severe chest pain, extreme dizziness, fainting, a severe anxiety attack, or uncontrollable shaking—**do not hesitate to call 911 or ask a co-worker to call for you.**
- **Documentation:** Any medical treatment you seek due to workplace stress or abuse provides important documentation for potential OWCP claims or grievances. Be sure to obtain a doctor's note or medical report that clearly links your condition to the workplace environment.

## Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

- **When applicable:** If the abusive supervision is based on your **race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, sexual orientation, and gender identity), national origin, age (40 or older), disability, genetic information, or retaliation for previous EEO activity or protected concerted activity**, you may have grounds for an EEO complaint.



- **Action:** You must initiate contact with an EEO counselor within **45 calendar days** of the discriminatory act. Your steward can advise you on whether your situation warrants an EEO complaint in conjunction with, or in addition to, a grievance. Remember, an EEO complaint is a legal process separate from the grievance procedure.
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## Reprisals for Reporting

The USPS and the National Agreement strictly prohibit retaliation against you for reporting workplace issues, including harassment or unsafe conditions. **Retaliation itself is a serious offense.**

- **ELM 665.23, "Prohibited Personnel Practices":** This section, among others, often lists specific actions management cannot take against employees for exercising their rights. Retaliation is typically covered here. In plain terms: Management cannot punish you for speaking up about abuse, harassment, or safety issues. This protection is very strong.
- **Article 14.3, "Employee Rights":** This article explicitly states that employees have the right to report unsafe conditions without reprisal.
- **The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) Section 7:** This federal law protects employees' rights to engage in "concerted activities for the purpose of mutual aid or protection." This includes discussing workplace issues with co-workers, seeking to improve working conditions, and filing grievances. Retaliation for such protected concerted activity is illegal. Simply put: You have a legal right to organize and act together to improve your working conditions, and management cannot fire or punish you for it. Reporting abuse, especially as part of a collective effort or through your union, often falls under this protection.
- **What to do:** If you experience any negative action—such as a schedule change, unfair discipline, increased scrutiny, denial of leave, or reassignment—**after** you've reported an issue or filed a grievance, immediately inform your steward. This constitutes a separate, and often very strong, grievance. Be sure to document any changes in treatment or negative actions, directly connecting them to your prior protected activity.

## Workers' Compensation (OWCP) and Abusive Supervision

While workers' compensation typically applies to physical injuries, severe and prolonged psychological trauma resulting from abusive supervision can be compensable under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA).

- **Applicability:** If the abuse leads to a diagnosed psychological condition (such as severe anxiety, depression, PTSD, or chronic stress-related illness) that is directly attributable to the workplace environment and goes beyond normal workplace stress, you might be able to file an OWCP claim.
  - **Key Requirement:** You'll need strong medical evidence from a medical doctor (a psychiatrist or psychologist specializing in occupational health is highly recommended). This evidence must clearly link your condition to the specific, identifiable workplace abuse, not just general stress. Your documentation of the abuse itself (grievances, witness statements, PS Form 1767s, etc.) will be crucial.
  - **Process:** Consult with your steward and discuss this possibility with your doctor. Filing an OWCP claim is complex and requires specific medical documentation (for example, **Form CA-2, "Notice of Occupational Disease and Claim for Compensation"** for conditions that develop over time). Be aware that OWCP claims for psychological injuries are often challenging to win and require persistence.
  - **In summary:** If your supervisor's abuse genuinely makes you sick or psychologically harmed to a diagnosable degree, you might be able to receive workers' compensation. However, it's difficult to prove and demands strong medical and factual support.
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## Arbitration Awards: Precedent and Enforcement

Arbitration awards are decisions made by neutral arbitrators on grievances. These decisions establish precedents that can be used to argue future cases.

- **Applicability:** Your union local and the National APWU often have access to a database of arbitration awards. If an arbitrator has previously ruled against the USPS for similar supervisory abuse, that award can be cited in your grievance as binding precedent. For example, an award might rule that a supervisor's consistent use of demeaning language violated Article 14's safety provisions or Article 19's adherence to ELM 665.24. This sets a precedent for similar future cases.
- **Simply put:** Past decisions by independent arbitrators can significantly strengthen your case. Your union stewards are trained to find and effectively utilize these awards.

## OSHA Guidelines: Federal Protections for Workplace Safety

Beyond the internal policies of the USPS and your union contract, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) provides federal regulations designed to ensure safe and healthy working conditions for all employees. While often associated with physical hazards, **OSHA's General Duty Clause** is particularly relevant to addressing abusive supervision that creates a psychologically unsafe or unhealthy work environment.

### The General Duty Clause

OSHA's **General Duty Clause**, found in Section 5(a)(1) of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, states that employers "shall furnish to each of his employees employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his employees."

- **Applicability to Abusive Supervision:** While not explicitly mentioning "abusive supervision," OSHA has interpreted "recognized hazards" to include workplace violence and, in some cases, severe psychological harm caused by a hostile work environment. If a supervisor's abusive behavior is severe, pervasive, and leads to documented physical or psychological harm (e.g., severe stress, anxiety, depression, or panic attacks that impede work or cause illness), it could potentially be considered a violation of this clause.
  - **In plain terms:** Your employer (the USPS) has a legal obligation under federal law to provide a workplace free from serious hazards, and this can extend to psychological hazards like extreme and prolonged abusive behavior from a supervisor that causes real harm.

### Reporting to OSHA

If internal remedies (grievances, PS Form 1767s, etc.) have not been effective in addressing severe and pervasive abusive supervision that you believe constitutes a recognized hazard causing serious harm:

- **When to Consider:** This is typically a step to consider when other avenues have been exhausted or for extremely egregious and documented patterns of abuse leading to significant health impacts.
- **How to File a Complaint:** You can file a confidential complaint with OSHA. You'll need to provide details about the hazardous conditions (the specific abusive behaviors), the dates and times they occurred, and how they have affected your health or safety.
- **OSHA's Role:** OSHA will investigate complaints to determine if a violation of safety and health standards or the General Duty Clause has occurred. They can issue citations and propose penalties if violations are found.
- **Protection Against Retaliation:** OSHA also protects workers from **retaliation** for reporting safety and health concerns. If you are disciplined, fired, or otherwise discriminated against for filing an OSHA complaint, you can file a whistleblower complaint with OSHA.



## Key Considerations for OSHA Complaints Related to Abusive Supervision

- **Documentation is Paramount:** Just as with grievances, meticulous documentation of the abusive incidents, their impact on your health, and any medical diagnoses linking your condition to the workplace is crucial for an OSHA complaint related to psychological harm.
- **Focus on Health and Safety Impact:** OSHA's primary concern is the impact on employee health and safety. Therefore, your complaint should clearly articulate how the supervisor's behavior creates an unsafe or unhealthy working condition that causes or is likely to cause serious physical or psychological harm.
- **Consult Your Union:** Always discuss the possibility of an OSHA complaint with your APWU steward. They can provide guidance on whether this is an appropriate step for your specific situation and how it might interact with ongoing grievances or other actions.

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## Safety Philosophies in the Contract

Beyond specific articles, the entire spirit of Article 14 and other provisions in your contract emphasizes a proactive approach to safety and a respectful workplace.

- **Proactive Safety:** The USPS is contractually obligated to prevent unsafe conditions, not merely react to them. Abusive supervision is a preventable unsafe condition that management has a clear duty to address and prevent.
- **Employee Involvement:** Your right to speak up, use the 1767 form, and participate in safety committees reflects a philosophy of employee empowerment in safety matters. You are an essential part of maintaining a safe workplace.
- **Mutual Respect:** While not always explicitly found in "safety" articles, the underlying principle of a safe workplace is one where employees are treated with dignity and respect. Abusive behavior directly undermines this fundamental principle. This is often reinforced by joint statements between the APWU and USPS, such as the "**Joint Statement on Dignity and Respect**" (often found in National Agreement appendices or as a separate document). This statement explicitly declares there is "no excuse for and will be no tolerance of harassment, intimidation, threats, or bullying by anyone at any level of the Postal Service."
- **In brief:** The contract isn't just about physical safety measures like hard hats; it's about ensuring your work environment is healthy and respectful in every way. You have a crucial role in making that happen, and the Postal Service itself recognizes and commits to a workplace built on dignity and respect.

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## Building a Support Network and Self-Care

Dealing with abusive supervision can be incredibly stressful and isolating. While this guide focuses on formal actions, protecting your mental and emotional well-being is equally important. You don't have to go through this alone.

### Building a Support Network

- **Talk to Trusted Colleagues:** Share your experiences with co-workers you trust. You may find others facing similar issues, which can strengthen a collective grievance or provide mutual support. Remember the protection of **National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) Section 7** (discussed in the "Reprisals for Reporting" section), which safeguards your right to engage in "concerted activities for the purpose of mutual aid or protection."
- **Lean on Family and Friends:** Discuss what you're experiencing with loved ones outside of work. Their understanding and support can be invaluable in managing stress.
- **Utilize Your Union's Community:** Beyond just your steward for grievances, connect with other union members and officers. The union is a community built on solidarity and mutual support.
- **Consider Professional Counseling:** A mental health professional (like a therapist, counselor, or psychologist) can offer strategies for coping with stress, anxiety, or depression resulting from workplace abuse. They can



also help you process any trauma. This can also provide valuable documentation if an **OWCP claim** becomes necessary (as discussed in the "Workers' Compensation" section).

## Prioritizing Self-Care

Abusive environments can truly erode your self-esteem and health. Actively engaging in self-care isn't a luxury; it's a necessity for your well-being.

- **Maintain a Healthy Routine:** Strive to maintain regular sleep patterns, eat nutritious meals, and engage in physical activity. These basic habits can significantly boost your resilience.
- **Set Boundaries:** Where possible, mentally (and physically) separate yourself from work stress when you're off the clock. Try to avoid checking work emails or constantly discussing work issues at home.
- **Engage in Hobbies and Interests:** Dedicate time to activities you genuinely enjoy that are completely unrelated to work. This helps shift your focus and provides a sense of normalcy and accomplishment.
- **Limit Exposure to the Abuser:** While not always possible during work hours, try to minimize unnecessary interactions with the abusive supervisor.
- **Practice Stress Reduction Techniques:** Simple techniques like mindfulness, meditation, deep breathing exercises, or even just listening to calming music can help manage acute stress.
- **Know Your Limits:** If stress becomes overwhelming and you feel your health significantly deteriorating, discuss potential leave options (like FMLA or sick leave) with your doctor and your steward. Your health is paramount.

By taking proactive steps to build a strong support system and care for yourself, you'll be much better equipped to navigate the challenges of abusive supervision and continue fighting for a respectful workplace.

## Empowerment Through Knowledge and Action

You have rights, and you have a powerful union standing right behind you. While dealing with abusive supervision can be incredibly stressful and isolating, remember that you are not powerless. The APWU is here to support you and fight for your protected rights every step of the way.

### Key Actions to Remember:

- **Document everything** thoroughly and accurately. Always keep these records off-site.
- **Contact your APWU Steward immediately.** They are your first and best resource.
- **Know your rights** as outlined in the National Agreement, the ELM, USPS Policies (especially the Workplace Harassment Policy), and any relevant MOUs.
- **Utilize the grievance procedure** as your primary internal recourse.
- **Use PS Form 1767** to report unsafe conditions, including those caused by supervisory abuse.
- **Do not tolerate threats or violence.** Report immediately to your steward, management, the **Postal Inspection Service (1-877-876-2455)**, and **911** if there's an immediate threat or physical assault.
- **Seek medical attention** if the abuse causes physical or psychological distress, and carefully document the link to your workplace.
- **Report any reprisals** for exercising your rights; retaliation is a separate and strong grievance.
- **Consider an EEO complaint** if the abuse is based on a protected characteristic.

By working together, APWU members can hold abusive supervisors accountable and ensure a safe, respectful, and productive work environment for all. Your courage to speak up helps not only yourself but also your fellow postal workers.

**Remember: This guide is a starting point. Always consult your local APWU representatives for specific advice and assistance. They are your most valuable resource in fighting abuse and upholding your rights.**

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