

No 422/20

17th August 2020

Dear Colleagues

Phil Bentham, Postman, Barrow-in-Furness DO and Mark Cremer, Postman, Lancing DO - Recent Deaths

We have received a number of enquiries in relation to the sad and tragic deaths of Phil Bentham, Postman, Barrow-in-Furness DO and Mark Cremer, Postman, Lancing DO. Sadly, both members died in separate incidents in different parts of the UK during last week's heatwave.

CWU HQ wishes to express its condolences and deepest sympathies to the families, friends and work colleagues of our two members who died in sad circumstances and we fully understand the grief and anxiety amongst Phil and Mark's work colleagues in their respective Delivery Units where emotions are naturally running high. To this end the Union is supporting the local Representatives and working closely with the two Branches concerned.

The exact cause of death of both Phil and Mark is yet to be determined and this will be subject to the normal procedures which may involve post-mortem examinations and coroner's inquests. Accordingly, we are not in a position to comment further until such time as investigations have been completed by the appropriate medical and, if necessary, the judicial authorities and their respective conclusions published.

Representations to Royal Mail

As Branches would expect, representations have been made to Royal Mail at the most senior level following these deaths. Specifically, concerns have been raised in relation to the important health and safety issues that need to be addressed in respect of working outdoors in excessively hot weather conditions. In particular, the issue of sun safety and dehydration risks to the outdoor workforce has been escalated several times over the last few months. We have of course also taken up this matter previously when similar hot conditions have been experienced.

Whilst it is unknown as to exactly what the causes of death were, the Union has requested a full joint Royal Mail/CWU investigation to examine whether or not there were any deficiencies in the Royal Mail "Severe Weather Risk Assessment" process and

if more can and should be done to protect the outdoor delivery workforce, including taking into account any underlying medical conditions that individual employees may have which warrant consideration.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) advise UK employers, that when working outdoors the effects of the weather in the environment can potentially have a serious impact on an employee's health, if the risks have not been considered or properly managed and controlled. The HSE also warns that too much sunlight is harmful and advises employers to provide free access to cool drinking water in order to avoid dehydration, heat exhaustion and sun stroke.

The British Heart Foundation (BHF) advise that hot weather means the body has to work harder to keep its core temperature at normal levels, and this puts extra strain on the heart, lungs and kidneys. This means people can be at greater risk if they have a heart condition. The BHF stress that it is particularly important to stay cool and hydrated. Drinking plenty of fluids helps to make up for the fact that people are sweating more than usual and stop your blood pressure from dropping too much.

The Union is seeking the agreement and support of Royal Mail in discharging fully its Health and Safety at Work duty of care to the outdoor workforce by ensuring that all Delivery Office Managers undertake Severe Weather Risk Assessments in hot, heatwave weather, in full consultation with our CWU Area Health and Safety Representatives. Where necessary Delivery Office Managers should make adjustments, modifications, reductions or cancellations to deliveries and they should follow the advice of the HSE.

Despite our representations there has unfortunately been little or no bottled water provision made for staff out on delivery in many units, even though Water Fountains being switched off (as a Covid-19 precaution) during the pandemic. The Union has been pressing Royal Mail for this to be addressed as a priority. In this regard further developments will be reported.

Branches and CWU Area Health & Safety Representatives are encouraged to make the necessary representations to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our members at all times and especially during periods of extreme or severe weather conditions. In this respect if difficulties are encountered, these should be reported to CWU headquarters immediately.

Yours sincerely

Andy Furey
Acting DGS(P)

Mark Baulch
Assistant Secretary Outdoor

Dave Joyce
**National Health, Safety &
Environment Officer**