



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on January 31, 2011

USPS to Close Thousands of Post Offices

The announcement follows the closing of 491 branches in 2010, and represents just a fraction of the 16,000 offices that the nation's postal service is reviewing for possible closure over the next several years. Those locations, which account for half the nation's 32,000 brick-and-mortar branches, have been identified as the worst performing post offices in the system, according to the [Wall Street Journal](#).



The problem with the postal services' austerity plan, some critics say, is that a disproportionate number of the closings would be concentrated in rural regions and smaller communities, where postal delivery is a vital part of the infrastructure linking people living in those areas to the outside world.

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But postal officials argue that in today's digital age, where individuals and companies are relying on e-mail, Facebook, Twitter, and texting, first class mail has taken a huge hit, making most smaller post offices economically unviable. In addition, overnight mail services such as UPS and Federal Express have torpedoed the postal service's commercial and business mail sector.

Faced with an outmoded delivery system, an entrenched union work force, aging automated equipment, and costs that far outweigh the worth of the service it provides, the USPS is hoping the latest proposed closings will save it hundreds of millions of dollars and hold off its inevitable demise — or at least the time when it becomes a shadow of the federal bureaucratic empire it once was.

Since 2000, the USPS has implemented six increases in rates, with its latest proposed hike coming last July when postal officials asked for a two-cent increase on first-class mail. It has also suggested dropping Saturday delivery, and has even proposed cutting Wednesdays as well, noting in a press release last year that "with plummeting mail volume traced to the recession and increased use of the Internet, the Postal Service is projecting a deficit of nearly \$7 billion for the next fiscal year."

Postmaster General Patrick R. Donahoe said the closings were designed to cut only the dead wood from his department's operations. "We have post offices out there that we have two customers, or three customers come in in an entire day," Donahoe said in a recent interview. "Remember the Maytag repairman? He used to have the loneliest job in the world. We probably have about 5,000 postmasters that have the loneliest job in the world."

Because it is prohibited by federal law from closing traditional post offices with mail processing systems and armies of carriers, the USPS is targeting the 2,000 or so outposts in shopping malls, sky scrapers, and stores that typically use leased space and which do not employ mail carriers.



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In reality, noted Dean Granholm, vice president of delivery and post office operations, several hundred of the proposed cuts will be for branches that have already been closed for a year or more (and some for decades) due to facility damage or lack of business. About 100 others are underperforming offices that were targeted for elimination in a 2009 postal service review that raised the ire of residents living in the areas that would be affected.

The publicity over the leaked report prompted tearful tales of elderly Americans in isolated rural areas who would soon lose their only connection to the outside world when the post office down at the local convenience store closed down.

“It ain’t right doing this to our community,” said one retired coal miner in Holmes Mill, Kentucky, where the post office is set to close after 100 years. “When they close the post office, they probably won’t even come up here anymore and clean the roads,” he speculated to a *Wall Street Journal* reporter.

“It will hurt us real bad,” another 62-year-old resident said as she worried about being forced to drive a half-dozen miles over rough terrain to reach the nearest post office still in operation.

But postal officials emphasize that residents of most small towns and rural areas who are used to a post office will still have daily service from carriers who will also have stamps and other supplies available to their back-roads customers.

While the USPS austerity plan seems to represent some much-needed fiscal common sense from one of the federal government’s most high-profile bureaucratic monsters, the fact that 64 percent of Americans oppose the closing of post offices, according to a *Washington Post*-ABC News poll, indicates that the public maintains an unreasonable attachment to the worn-out relic created by Benjamin Franklin over 235 years ago.

But Postmaster Donahoe has a plan to help them let go, as he aggressively lobbies Congress to repeal the law that prohibits him from closing larger unprofitable post offices. If he succeeds in thinning out half of the post offices now in operation over the next few years, we may be witnessing the slow, subtle swan song of one of America’s last truly iconic institutions.



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