



Putting the “W” in RSMC

Women as Rural and Suburban Mail Carriers

It takes guts to be a RSMC.

It takes guts to be a RSMC if you're a woman.

I am a RSMC and, like 66% of RSMCs, I am a woman. I know the highs and lows of this job.

We survive (sometimes just barely) despite the whim of management and an inadequate pay system. We carry out our day to day mail delivery often under unsafe circumstances and handle parcels that tax the strength of even our strongest RSMC brothers. We lose wages to route restructures and through an outdated route management system where time values and consideration for volume are non-existent.

We are often the forgotten ones ... floor meetings, safety equipment, a proper route measurement system, fair wages and benefits,



corporate bonuses ... oh, aren't the RSMCs included? I watched a supervisor handing out rubber gloves to the urban employees because hazardous material was found in outgoing mail and he walked right past the RSMCs. When this neglect was brought to his attention, he replied, “Oh I forgot about them.”

Even the corporation at the top forgets about us. Man-

agement are well known for repeating their viewpoints and a supervisor was heard saying that RSMC routes are just “pin money” for housewives. Because of a sexist attitude towards women, RSMC routes remain undervalued.

Yet we enjoy the work. We enjoy the service we provide for customers, and the company of our co-workers. It's uplifting when the sun shines and we can enjoy the outdoors, never far from our vehicle should a sudden shower threaten. We enjoy the flexibility and autonomy that allows us the freedom to manage our many lives: jobs, homes, personal time and often a second or even a third job, just to make a living, although this bit of freedom is noticeably diminishing.

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Unfortunately our flexibility gets taken advantage of. What it often means is we are free to work (for free!) as many hours as it takes to get the job done because we don't get paid for the number of hours that we actually work.

Since RSMCs became a part of CUPW in 2004, we've seen improvements in wages, pensions and other benefits. We've seen a glimpse of how solidarity has produced these valuable changes to our collective agreement, but we know much more is needed.

Being a part of the RSMC Negotiation Committee for this last re-opener has been a real education for me. I've had the opportunity to visit work floors across the country and meet the hard-working members who enjoy their jobs but are unhappy when the system works against them. I see the improvements that are so badly needed and I know how easily these changes could be made by the stroke of a pen from those at the top, if only they would realize the importance of the RSMC contribution to Canada Post.

It has been frustrating to see the employer continue the attitude that RSMCs don't matter. It has been difficult to watch their indifference towards the members' list of demands and those that are especially important for women. We've asked for benefits such as the drug plan, payments into the Childcare Fund, parental leave and sick leave, paid benefits that are sadly lacking in our current Collective Agreement.

Those of us sitting at the negotiation table see blatant evidence of the employer's patronizing position toward us. For example, their proposals were in place before we began the process, they were presented as a package and at no time did they allow the give-and-take that is part of normal negotiations. Our list of demands was dismissed, even though the committee spent considerable time researching in order to present a fair argument.

Furthermore, they would not tell us what any of their proposals would cost. Their "package" deal was clearly designed to appear attractive to cause dissent among the members.

Perhaps they assumed we would not look too closely and find out how detrimental some of their proposals really are. Although this patronizing attitude is aimed at all RSMCs, it's also an age-old approach by those who wield the most power (traditionally, men) toward those who have none (traditionally, women).

Women working as RSMCs create a strong sisterhood. It's there in the birthday cake for a co-worker and it's there when a hug or laugh is shared. It's there when disaster strikes and a member cannot cope with piled-up mail and personal problems. Friendships develop, along with a strength that comes from being part of a unified front.

We stick together, striving for fair workplaces all across the country. Thumbs up for RSMC women!



*Rose Johnson, RSMC
Negotiations Committee*

Sick Leave and Women



A Statistics Canada study has concluded that women are more likely than men to take sick leave. They also take more days of paid sick absences than men. In 2009, the difference between illness and disability leave usage for men and women in the public sector was noticeable. Women took an average of 9.1 days per year and men used an average of 6.5 days.

Canada Post's own figures reveal the same trend. A 2007 Canada Post presentation showed that women had higher absenteeism rates due to illness than men.

Why these results? Women aren't necessarily more sickly than men. They do tend to be more likely than men to rest and to go to the doctor for treatment when they are ill.

Paid sick leave allows workers to regain their health and return to full productivity at work. Using sick leave can reduce overall absence by protecting co-workers from contagion. If Canada Post attempts to roll back current sick leave provisions, it will affect women far more harshly than men. Protecting our sick leave protects women's rights.

Women and the Environment

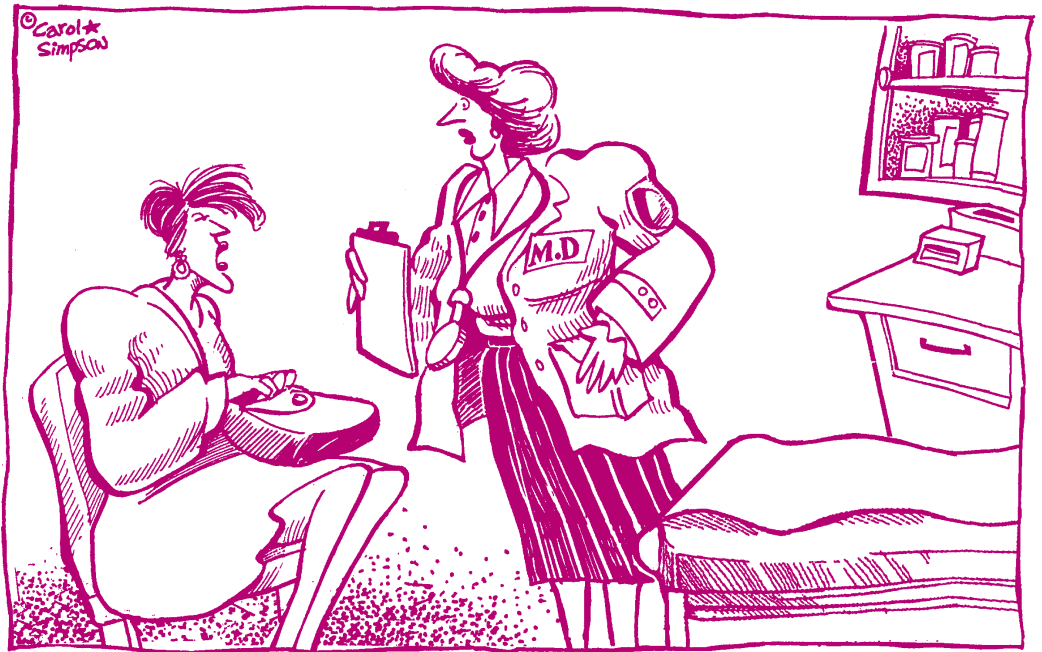
More and more of us are becoming more aware that we face environmental crisis, but it's less obvious that the environmental crisis is also a women's issue. One example is the special relationship that women have with water. Renowned Indian environmentalist Vandana Shiva tells us:

“Women carry the water to get it home.
They are the first to know water is polluted.
They are the first to know the well has run dry.
They are the first to know the water is saline.
They are the canaries of the eco-crisis.”



Night Work

Canada Post is increasing the number of people on night work. Society is organized around the “normal workday.” While this winds down, many women working night shift are heading to their jobs and facing these potential issues:



“Could you reset my biological clock? They put me on the nightshift again.”

Assault: In many locations, women walk or rely on inadequate public transportation to get to and from work. Commuting at night puts women at increased risk.

Cancer Risk: A strong link exists between night work and the risk of cancer. A 2001 study of 7,000 Danish women with breast cancer found that women between 30-54 who worked nights for at least half a year had a 50% higher risk of developing primary breast cancer than women in the same age group who worked days. Among women who worked night shifts for 6 or more years, the risk jumped to 70%.

Reproductive Risks: Pregnant women who work a night shift between 10 p.m -7 a.m. have a higher risk of delivering prematurely than women who work the same number of hours during the day, according to a study published in the journal *Obstetrics & Gynaecology* (2005). Another 2007 study found that one of the effects of night shift work for women was an increase in irregular menstrual cycles.

Lack of Childcare: Women have many jobs to balance, including caregiver roles. Family responsibilities often significantly contribute to lack of sleep and other sleep problems while working night shift. Safe, licensed childcare spaces are rarely available for midnight shift workers. This often leaves parents scrambling for secure and affordable childcare arrangements while working nightshift.

Night shifts harm women. Canada Post should be making every effort to minimize night shift work and ensure that our work is normally performed in the day.

