

Postal customers report checks stolen in 60631

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The U.S. Postal Inspection Service is conducting an investigation into the possible theft of mail from the Norwood Park Postal Station (60631), 6300 N. Northwest Highway.

Rhonda Podkowa, of Norwood Park, put seven envelopes in one of the outdoor postal collection boxes on June 23. One of the envelopes contained a \$2,000 loan payment. The others contained checks sent for utility bills, which were in much smaller denominations.

The \$2,000 check cleared on June 28. She did not realize there was a problem until she received a delinquency notice from a collection agency. Podkowa was able to get a copy of the check from her bank.

In the upper right corner of the check, where pre-printed personal information is located, her telephone number was crossed out, but the lines containing her name and address were left intact.

The account number for which the payment was due was erased or somehow obliterated. On the payee line, "Pay to the order of," the name of the company she made the check out to was "washed out," she said. In its place someone had scrawled a different company name. The handwriting only slightly resembled Podkowa's.

When she went to the post office to drop her envelopes into the postbox, she noticed it was stuffed and mail was easily visible from the opening.

After Podkowa let go of her envelopes and started driving away, "I had a gut feeling that I shouldn't have done that."

She said she wanted to go back to the box and retrieve the mail she had just deposited in the box. But Podkowa was worried about the impression it might give to a passer-by if she was seen digging in the box. So Podkowa left, worried, but hoping her checks would get to where they belonged.

Although the \$2,000 check had been altered and cashed, the remaining checks, which were made out in smaller amounts, never made it to the recipients and never cleared, indicating that they were not cashed.

"It's been a scary, scary thing for me," Podkowa said.

Norwood Park resident Geri Felke also put her mail in the outdoor post box on June 23. She put five checks for separate gas bills in one envelope. Another envelope contained a check for the city's Department of Water. A third was sent to Ameritech.

Felke first realized that something was wrong when she received a non-payment notice from the water department in July. Her July billing statements from Peoples Gas and Ameritech indicated that her payments has not been received.

"As far as I'm concerned, my checks are just missing in action," Felke said.

When Felke put her mail in the mailbox it did not appear full and she assumed her mail was safe.

After learning that her bills did not get paid and hearing that other people were experiencing similar problems, she went to the Norwood Park Postal Station. Felke was told that the Postal Inspection Service was aware of the problem. She was handed a letter to send to utility providers and other companies to whom she had sent payments. The letter indicates that the U.S. Postal Service is conducting an investigation and the mail has not yet been recovered. Felke said she was told by personnel at the Norwood Park postal station that she is not alone, and that others also had missing checks.

Sylvia Carrier, spokeswoman for the Postal Inspection Service, said there is an active investigation involving the possible theft of mail from the Norwood Park Postal Station.

Both Felke and Podkowa mailed their checks on a Sunday, when the outdoor boxes tend to be full. The last posted pickup for the drive-up boxes in the parking lot before Monday morning is mid-day on Saturday.

Nadeam Elshami, spokesman for U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-9th, whose district includes the Norwood Park postal station, said the congresswoman had been contacted by constituents, and that she is was aware of the problem and has been in contact with the U.S. Postal Service.