

# Parcel Delivery Workers



## Occupational Brief Title Codes:

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- O\*NET™: 43-5021.00
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## Work Classification Based Related

### D.O.T. Occupations:

- Advertising-Material Distributors
- Delivery Department Supervisors
- Mail Carriers
- Singing Messengers

## Interests Based Related

### G.O.E. Occupations:

- Mailroom Supervisors
- Pages
- Routing Clerks
- Sorters

## Skills Based Related

### O\*NET Occupations:

- Cargo and Freight Agents
- Dining Room and Cafeteria Attendants and Bartender Helpers
- Mail Clerks, Except Mail Machine Operators and Postal Service
- Parking Lot Attendants

## Noteworthy Quote:

*“One nice thing about being a parcel deliverer is that you are your own boss. The job is interesting because you are constantly on the move. I get to see and talk to lots of different people, while being able to witness the interactions of people in different types of businesses that I visit everyday.”*

– Spence Blomfield-Brown, Parcel Deliverer, United Parcel Service

**Parcel delivery workers** (par-cel de`liv-ery `work-ers) work for delivery and messenger firms picking up, sorting, shipping, and delivering packages and documents to homes and businesses throughout the United States and the world.

The movement of parcels and letters is very important to millions of people. Many individuals and businesses, both large and small, would be unable to carry on their operations without the daily shipment and receipt of goods.

The oldest and perhaps best known of these firms is United Parcel Service or UPS. Other courier companies include Federal Express, Menlo Worldwide–Emery Forwarding, and DHL–Airborne Express. Each offers a wide range of services for the transport of goods and documents between metropolitan areas and urban centers throughout the United States and worldwide. Each has an extensive network of courier establishments, its own fleet of vehicles, and most have aircraft.

There are also numerous local messenger services located in every major city in the United States. These companies provide local delivery of parcels within a metropolitan or single urban area, usually by bicycle, foot, small truck, or van. They provide point-to-point pickup and delivery, and generally do not operate as part of an intercity courier network.

## Work Performed

Parcel delivery workers, also known as *couriers*, perform about the same tasks as those of post office mail carriers and postal clerks. However, unlike the Post Office, courier companies ship using a method called the hub and spoke system. The hubs, strategically placed, are large centers for the exchange and rerouting of items moving over a broad region.

Couriers who drive a truck collect documents and packages and take them to a distribution center. There, other delivery workers sort and separate the items. They



*Drivers pick up and deliver packages, collect charges, fill out delivery forms, and issue receipts for items delivered.*  
Photo by CGP Staff

put items for delivery within a local region into sections for local delivery. Items addressed to points outside the local region may go by truck or plane to other distribution centers. Packages traveling greater distances can move from hub to hub before they go to distribution centers. This hub and spoke system helps workers and those in charge trace shipments. With modern technology, workers know where a package is at all times.

**Drivers** pick up and deliver packages, collect charges, fill out delivery forms, and issue receipts for items delivered. They also make sure the paperwork of the sender is in order. They keep a log of all pickups and deliveries. Some delivery vans have on-board or hand-held computers. Drivers can record transactions electronically as well as keep in touch with the operation center. Others communicate by two-way radio and pagers.

Drivers take the packages that they have picked up to the operation center. There, other workers sort the packages. They load those destined for delivery outside the local region on planes or trucks that take the load to a hub. At the hub, all packages go through the sorting system.

Packages intended for ground delivery are sorted by workers called **sorters**. Sorting for air delivery is automated. Electronic scanners that read bar codes or computers that read labels speed the flow of packages through miles of conveyors. A hub can sort tens of thousands of packages in an hour. The larger or central hubs within the system are connected with the United States Customs Service. Workers at computer terminals can compile information and generate documents required to clear packages through customs, and can code and track packages en route.

Workers load packages on planes for shipment to another hub, which may be in the United States or overseas. Ground packages are loaded into trucks, which are driven to distribution centers. At the distribution centers, **local drivers** pick up and deliver the packages to individuals or companies.

Many workers are employed in distribution. They load and unload aircraft and vehicles, check shipments, and do related tasks in customer service. They drive company vans or trucks to and from airports or door-to-door for pickups and deliveries. Others work at hubs where they sort, exchange, load and unload packages.

Parcel delivery workers who provide local delivery services of small items within a single metropolitan or urban center are often called **messengers**. These workers generally do not operate as part of an intercity courier network, but offer direct pickup and delivery from one establishment to the next. Messengers pickup and deliver letters, important business documents, or small packages that need to be sent or received quickly within a local area. Most use bicycles or travel on foot, but small trucks or vans may be used for larger deliveries, such as legal caseloads and conference materials.

Many messengers work for messenger or courier services picking up items from anyone and delivering them to local specified destinations for a fee. Others work for legal, financial, and business firms, medical facilities, and government agencies. These couriers carry items only for their

employer, such as important legal or financial documents, passports, airline tickets, or medical samples to be tested. A few are self-employed independent contractors. They provide their own vehicles and, to a certain extent, set their own deliveries.

Like other parcel delivery workers, messengers receive their instructions either in person (by reporting to their office), or by telephone, two-way radio, or wireless data service. They receive instructions from **dispatchers**, maintain records of deliveries, and obtain signatures from the persons receiving the items.

### **Working Conditions**

Working conditions for parcel delivery workers vary by occupation and employment setting. Operation and distribution centers are large, modern, clean, and well-lighted. Couriers and messengers spend most of their time alone, outdoors or in their vehicle, making deliveries, and usually are not closely supervised.

Speed is the key to this occupation. Most parcel delivery companies offer overnight or two day delivery services, while local messenger and courier services offer one hour or same day deliveries. Workers are subject to the pressure of performing within strict guidelines of time and efficiency. In some companies, sorters must take speed and accuracy tests twice a month. Drivers and messengers must follow a strict route and schedule to deliver packages quickly.

Most jobs involve frequent bending, walking, and stretching. Sorters often stand for long periods, while drivers often sit for long periods. Sorters and drivers must lift and carry boxes that may weigh up to seventy pounds, either manually or with the aid of a handtruck. Drivers also have to deal with difficult parking situations, as well as traffic jams and road construction. Those who deliver by bicycle or foot must be physically fit and are exposed to all weather conditions, as well as to the many hazards associated with heavy traffic.

### **Hours and Earnings**

The nature of the courier business is alternating bursts of activity and slack time throughout the day. Workers in this industry may work part-time, full-time, and in rotating shifts that may include weekends, evenings, and some holidays.

Most part-time employees work from three to five hours a day, five days a week. Many workers are also on call to fill in for regular part-time or full-time workers, who may be sick or on vacation. Full-time workers have a regularly scheduled forty-hour work week, but couriers and messengers often work later in order to complete pickups and deliveries for the day.

Earnings vary by occupation, experience, training, and employer. Most couriers and messengers who work for local delivery services are paid on a commission basis—receiving a percentage of the total fee for each delivery. Couriers and messengers who work for intercity delivery companies, and for legal, financial, and business firms, medical facilities, and government agencies, however, generally receive a regular wage.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2002, most couriers and messengers earned from \$6.50 to \$14.50 an hour. Approximately half earned between \$7.50 and \$11.50 an hour. The average wage was \$9.96 an hour. Starting pay for part-time workers is \$8.00 to \$10.00 an hour. Full-time employees start at \$12.00 to \$15.00 an hour.

Many of the larger intercity parcel delivery companies offer both full-time and part-time workers company-paid benefits, including paid vacations and holidays, pension plans, health and life insurance, and educational assistance. Some workers receive Christmas, end-of-the-year, or profit sharing bonuses. Many local delivery services, however, are small and cannot afford such extensive benefits. Most only offer limited benefits to full-time employees.

### **Education and Training**

Most companies prefer high school graduates, and often hire college students for part-time positions. High school students should take English, history, and mathematics. Communications skills are important. The ability to operate a computer is a valuable skill. Driver training courses are one way to prepare for driving jobs and for obtaining a commercial driver's license.

All new employees get on-the-job training. Training is precise. Each task, whether picking up or delivering parcels or sorting packages in a central hub, is a planned and timed process. New employees get exact instructions on procedures and are expected to follow them.

At regular intervals sorters undergo checks for speed and accuracy. Drivers also must meet strict performance standards. Beginners learn to inspect the trucks and freight, to maneuver trucks on crowded streets and in highway traffic, and to comply with federal, state, and local regulations.

Other training may cover general duties, the operation and loading of a truck, company policies, and the preparation of delivery forms and company records. Training on the proper use of hand-held scanning/package tracking devices is important to ensure customer information enters the system accurately. Newly hired drivers may also ride with and assist experienced drivers before they are assigned their own runs.

A bachelor's or master's degree is helpful for individuals who wish to advance to management positions. These companies have positions requiring staff with a broad range of academic specialties. Individuals with a degree in accounting, information technology, communications, logistics, marketing, or administration are always in demand.

### **Licensing, Unions, and Professional Societies**

All drivers must have a clean driver's license. It must be valid for the state in which they work and for the vehicle they drive. Some driving positions may require a commercial driver's license. Employers may also require a driver to be at least twenty-one years old.

Local laws regulating messenger services vary with each city, but generally cover the use of bicycles. Some have extremely detailed regulations, while others have few if any.

In New York City, for example, bicycle messengers must be issued a numbered photo identification card containing a photograph of the operator, and the name and address of both the bicycle operator and the company. Chicago's messenger ordinance also requires licensing, and insurance coverage.

Many couriers and messengers find professional support from organizations such as the Messenger Courier Association of the Americas (MCAA), the International Federation of Bike Messenger Associations (IFBMA), and any of a number of local messenger organizations. Such groups work to promote and advance the common interests of those in the messenger courier industry. Many sponsor industry meetings, educational seminars, and other networking services; offer group rate health insurance and wholesale licensing; publish magazines, articles, and email updates on featured news; and represent their members on issues that affect the industry, such as independent contractor laws and IRS regulations on driver reimbursement rates.

Management staff may also join any of a number of specialty groups. The Council of Logistics Management, for instance, is an organization of individuals whose members deal with the warehousing, transport, inventory, distribution, and logistics of materials management.

### **Personal Qualifications**

Sorters and couriers must be able to handle packages weighing up to seventy pounds. Speed and accuracy are required of all delivery workers. Being a team player is important in getting the shipments from one place to another.

Since parcel delivery workers deal with the public, they must have good communications skills. They should be courteous, dependable, and efficient. The ability to speak well and a neat appearance are especially important.

Since drivers and messengers work with little direct supervision, they should be responsible and self-motivated. Federal regulations also require employers to test their drivers for alcohol and drug use as a condition of employment, and also require periodic random tests for workers on duty.

Occupations can be adapted for workers with disabilities. Persons should contact their school or employment counselors, their state office of vocational rehabilitation, or their state department of labor to explore fully their individual needs and requirements as well as the requirements of the occupation.

### **Where Employed**

Intercity parcel delivery companies operate throughout the United States as well as worldwide, while local delivery services operate in metropolitan and densely populated urban areas. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, couriers and messengers held around 132,000 jobs in 2002. About 28 percent were employed in the courier and messenger services industry. About 13 percent worked in health-care services for general medical and surgical hospitals, and medical and diagnostic laboratories. Around 9 percent worked in legal services, and another 8 percent were employed in finance and insurance firms.

## Employment Outlook

Parcel delivery workers perform work essential to almost everyone, and are a major force in United States' commerce. In a mobile and global society, millions of individuals and businesses need to quickly send and receive letters and packages every day. The service must be fast, accurate, and reliable.

Although overall employment of couriers and messengers is expected to grow more slowly than the average rate through 2012, the need for courier services will continue to grow as commerce continues to expand across the country and throughout the globe. In addition to an increase of nearly 5,000 new positions, nearly 31,000 positions will open due to replacement needs.

Many forces shape the growth of this industry. Despite an increasing volume of business documents, promotional materials, and other information that must be handled and delivered, e-mail and fax machines can deliver information faster than couriers and messengers can. A great deal of information is also available over the Internet.

However, couriers and messengers will still be needed to transport materials that cannot be sent electronically, such as medical samples, specimens, blueprints, securities, and passports. In many types of business and legal transactions an electronic copy cannot substitute for the original document. The increasing popularity of Internet shopping has also increased parcel shipping. The long-range job outlook is best for dependable workers with some knowledge of computer operations.

## Entry Methods

The best way to enter this field is to apply directly to any local office of one of these companies. Many of the larger employers list job openings on their web sites. Local companies may list job openings in local newspapers. The placement offices of schools and colleges may have leads on part-time jobs and internships for students at intercity courier companies. Many workers in this industry start as part-time workers while still in school. They may later become full-time employees.

## Advancement

Advancement opportunities vary, but performance is essential. Good workers get regular raises. Some workers prefer a career as a driver or messenger. Others may prepare to move into the office to learn sorting, dispatching, or taking service requests. Those with management skills may move into supervisory or middle management positions. Those who continue their education, often have opportunities to advance higher and faster. Most of the larger intercity courier companies offer tuition reimbursement, or internal training courses or programs. After several years, couriers and messengers with excellent business skills and sufficient funding may even choose to open their own delivery service company.

## For Further Research

**Federal Express Corporation**, 942 S. Shady Grove Road, Memphis, TN 38120. Web site: [www.fedex.com](http://www.fedex.com)

**International Federation of Bike Messenger Associations**, P.O. Box 191443, San Francisco, CA 94119-1443. Web site: [www.messengers.org](http://www.messengers.org)

**Messenger Courier Association of the Americas**, 1156 Fifteenth Street, N.W., Suite 900, Washington, DC 20005. Web site: [www.mcaa.com](http://www.mcaa.com)

**United Parcel Service of America, Inc.**, 55 Glenlake Parkway, N.E., Atlanta, GA 30328. Web site: [www.ups.com](http://www.ups.com)

## Acknowledgments

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