Going postal
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For other uses, see Going postal (disambiguation).

Going postal, in American English slang, means becoming extremely and uncontrollably angry, often to the point of violence, and usually in a workplace environment.

The expression derives from a series of incidents from 1986 onward in which United States Postal Service (USPS) workers shot and killed managers, fellow workers, and members of the police or general public in acts of mass murder. Between 1986 and 1997, more than 40 people were gunned down by current or former employees in at least 20 incidents of workplace rage.

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Origin

The earliest known citation is December 17, 1993 in the St. Petersburg Times:

“The symposium was sponsored by the U.S. Postal Service, which has seen so many outbursts that in some circles excessive stress is known as 'going postal.' Thirty-five people have been killed in 11 post office shootings since 1983. The USPS does not approve of the term "going postal" and has made attempts to stop people from using the saying. Some postal workers, however, feel it has earned its place appropriately.”[1]

December 31, 1993 in Los Angeles Times:
Unlike the more deadly mass shootings around the nation, which have lent a new term to the language, referring to shooting up the office as "going postal".[2]

Notable postal shootings

Main article: List of postal killings

Edmond, Oklahoma in 1986

On August 20, 1986, 14 employees were shot and killed and six wounded at the Edmond, Oklahoma, post office by Patrick Sherrill, a postman who then committed suicide with a shot to the forehead.[3]

Ridgewood, New Jersey in 1991

A former United States postal worker, Joseph M. Harris, killed his former supervisor, Carol Ott, and killed her boyfriend, Cornelius Kasten Jr., at their home. The following morning, on October 10, 1991, Harris shot and killed two mail handlers, Joseph M. VanderPaauw, 59, of Prospect Park, N.J., and Donald McNaught, 63, of Pompton Lakes, N.J. at the Ridgewood, New Jersey Post Office.[4][5]

Royal Oak, Michigan in 1991

On November 14, 1991 in Royal Oak, Michigan, Thomas McIlvane killed five people, including himself, with a Ruger 10/22 rifle in Royal Oak's post office, after being fired from the Postal Service for "insubordination." He had been previously suspended for getting into altercations with postal customers on his route.[6]

Double event in 1993

Two shootings took place on the same day, May 6, 1993, a few hours apart. At a post office in Dearborn, Michigan, Lawrence Jasion wounded three and killed one, and subsequently killed himself. In Dana Point, California, Mark Richard Hilbun killed his mother, then shot two postal workers dead.[7]

As a result of these two shootings, in 1993 the Postal Service created 85 Workplace Environment Analysts for domicile at its 85 postal districts. These new positions were created to help with violence prevention and workplace improvement. In February 2009, the Postal Service unilaterally eliminated these positions as part of its downsizing efforts.[8]

Goleta, California, in 2006
Jennifer San Marco, a former postal employee, killed six postal employees before committing suicide with a handgun, on the evening of January 30, 2006, at a large postal processing facility in Goleta, California.\[9\]

Police later also identified a seventh victim dead in a condominium complex in Goleta where San Marco once lived.\[10\]

According to media reports, the Postal Service had forced San Marco to retire in 2003 because of her worsening mental problems. Her choice of victims may have also been racially motivated; San Marco had a previous history of racial prejudice, and tried to obtain a business license for a newspaper of her own ideas, called The Racist Press, in New Mexico.

This incident is believed to be the deadliest workplace shooting ever carried out in the United States by a woman.\[11\][12]

**Baker City, Oregon, in 2006**

Grant Gallaher, a letter carrier in Baker City, Oregon, pleaded guilty to the April 4, 2006 murder of his supervisor.\[13\] He reportedly brought his .357 Magnum revolver to the city post office with the intention of killing his postmaster. Arriving at the parking lot, he reportedly ran over his supervisor several times. Subsequently he went into the post office looking for his postmaster. Not finding the postmaster, he went back out to the parking lot and shot his supervisor several times at close range, ostensibly to make sure she was dead. He then reportedly fired several more bullets into the supervisor's car.

Grant Gallaher reportedly was on a new route for three weeks and had felt pressured by a week-long work-time study and an extra 20 minutes added to his new route. On the day of his rampage, he reportedly was ahead of schedule on his route and his supervisor brought him more mail to deliver. He allegedly decided to take the matter up with his postmaster on his cell phone and then went home to get his .357 Magnum revolver to exact his revenge. The work climate had reportedly improved from what it was in 1998, the year a 53-year-old union steward at the Baker City post office committed suicide.

**Analysis**

Researchers have found that the homicide rates at postal facilities were lower than at other workplaces. In major industries, the highest rate of 2.1 homicides per 100,000 workers per year was in retail. The next highest rate of 1.66 was in public administration, which includes police officers. The homicide rate for postal workers was 1.48 per 100,000.\[14\]

However, not all murders on the job are directly comparable to "going postal". Taxi drivers, for example, are much more likely to be murdered by passengers than by their peers. Working in retail means one is exposed to store robberies. In 1993, the United States Congress conducted a joint hearing to review the violence in the U.S. Postal Service. In the hearing, it was noted that despite the postal service accounting for less than 1% of the full-time civilian labor force, 13% of workplace homicides were committed at postal facilities by current or former employees.\[15\]

**Cultural impact**
In the controversial video game series *Postal* the player takes on a first-person role performing normally mundane chores (such as picking up a paycheck from work) with an often gratuitously violent twist. In 1997, the United States Postal Service (USPS) sued the creators of the game, Running With Scissors Inc., over the use of the term "postal". Running With Scissors argued that, despite its title, the game has absolutely nothing to do with the Post Office or its employees. The case was dismissed with prejudice in 2003.[16]

The 1995 film *Clueless* is credited with popularizing the phrase "going postal" and is responsible for the term's casual usage still today.[17] The actors in the film had no idea what it meant to "go postal" as it was then an uncommon phrase in the mainstream.[18]

See also

- 2010 Panama City school board shootings
- Amok
- Fragging
- List of postal killings
- List of massacres
- Postal – a video game series
- Road rage
- Spree killer
- List of rampage killers (workplace killings)
- School shooting
- Son of Sam - A serial killer (rather than spree killer as is this article's primary focus) who worked for the postal service

References

1. Vick, Karl, "Violence at work tied to loss of esteem", *St. Petersburg Times*, Dec 17, 1993
8. Musacco, Stephen (2009). *Beyond going postal: Shifting from workplace tragedies and toxic workplace environments to a safe and healthy organization*. Booksurge. p. 34. "the notion of 'going postal' as a myth is not supported by the overwhelming evidence to the contrary"
Further reading

- *Beyond Going Postal* by Stephen Musacco, which examines the paramilitary, authoritarian postal culture and its relationship to toxic workplace environments and postal tragedies. (ISBN 1-439220-75-1)
- *Going Postal: Rage, Murder, and Rebellion* by Mark Ames, which examines the rise of office and school shootings in the wake of the Reagan Revolution, and compares the shootings to slave rebellions (ISBN 1-932360-82-4)
- *Going Postal* by Don Lasseter, which examines the issue of workplace shootings inside the USPS (ISBN 0-7860-0439-8)
- *Lone Wolf* by Pan Pantziarka, a comprehensive study of the spree killer phenomenon, and looks in detail at a number of cases in the U.S., UK and Australia. (ISBN 0-7535-0437-5)
- Bob Dart, "'Going postal' is a bad rap for mail carriers, study finds" (http://nl.newsbank.com/nl-search/we/Archives?s_hidethis=no&p_product=AASB&p_theme=aasb&p_action=search&p_maxdocs=200&s_dispstring="Going%20postal%20is%20a%20bad%20rap"&p_field_advanced-0=&p_text_advanced-0=("Going%20postal%20is%20a%20bad%20rap")&xcal_numdocs=20&p_perpage=10&p_sort=YMD_date:D&xcal_useweights=no), *Austin American-Statesman*, September 2, 2000, p. A28

External links

- Copycat Effect (http://hammernews.com/copycateffect.htm)- review of Coleman's book on tendency of publicity about mass deaths to provoke more with section on postal shootings

Look up *go postal* in Wiktionary, the free dictionary.
- Open Letter to the United States Congress outlining the critical need for reform of the authoritarian postal culture via Congressional intervention and legislation. (Musacco, 2009) (http://www.postalreporter.com/chapter-11-beyond-going-postal.pdf). (Chapter 11 of book Beyond Going Postal (http://www.amazon.com/dp/1439220751) Note: In chapter 4: fallacies, omissions, and inaccurate conclusions in the 2000 Report of the United States Service Commission on a Safe and Secure Workplace were examined, especially the conclusion that "going postal was a myth, a bad rap".


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