

'Reaching arm' replaces human mail helpers

"It sucks." That's how a part-time Canada Post rural Acton mail delivery helper – George Forest – known as an "ergonomic assistant" reacted to being replaced with a piece of equipment – a "reaching device" Canada Post now uses to deliver rural mail.

With 843,000 rural mail boxes in Canada,

the reaching arm is being "rolled out nationally" according to John Caines, a Canada Post spokesman. Locally, approximately five temporary helpers in Limehouse, Campbellville, Acton and Rockwood have been or will be replaced by the reaching arms.

Caines said several years

ago, a review of rural mail delivery uncovered staff concerns with safety and ergonomics when delivering mail out the right side of the vehicle. "We temporarily hired some assistants for them until we either got right-hand-drive vehicles or found a device that would handle the reach portion from an ergonomic standpoint," Caines said.

The reaching arm is a partially-telescoping pole with a hook and basket-like attachment on one end. "They can actually open the mail box, they can grab mail, put mail in the box and close it as well," he said, adding it is "quite a handy device", one that was designed by a rural carrier in Quebec, originally using a hockey stick.

Forest is not impressed with the design of the Canada Post reaching arm. He was an ergonomic helper for his wife, rural mail carrier Barb Forest, until he was laid off last week.

"We have one in the car that we use sometimes



REACHER READY: Acton rural mail delivery person Barb Forest no longer has an ergonomic helper (a human) to put mail in boxes out of the right side of her vehicle - she, like some other rural carriers in Canada - must use a "reacher arm" after her helper was laid off this week and replaced with the device this week. - Marie Shadbolt photos

ourselves, but this (Canada Post model) is three times as heavy. It's even heavy to me to lift it out - I don't know how Barb does it because it's hard on her back and everything," Forest said on Friday.

Barb Forest said rural residents were advised of the change two years ago, and her job would be much easier if people complied with the Canada Post guidelines. "It should be 39-to-42-inches from the bottom of the (mail)

box to the ground," Forest said on Tuesday. She said that 60 of the 230 rural mailboxes on her Acton route need repair, and that Canada Post officials checked rural mailboxes in the Limehouse area on Tuesday.

Forest said if people don't fix their mailboxes within 15 days, they must go to the Post Office to pick up their mail. During that period, Forest said she would either get out of her car to put it in the box, or

take it to the house.

There are 10 rural routes in the Acton/Rockwood area, and Caines did not know how many had temporary ergonomic helpers, and now would be trained and switched to the reaching arm. "I don't know how many would have lost their jobs, but they wouldn't have been full-time jobs - they would have been temporary until we found a way to either go to right-hand-drive or get the ergonomic device," Caines said.

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