# As postal trucks catch fire, USPS takes on big task of updating its fleet

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### WGN Investigates

The iconic postal truck may have outlived its time, as videos of the trucks bursting into flames continue to surface across the country.

There are dozens of media reports about engines exploding as letter carriers are out making their deliveries. Witnesses said the same thing happened in a Chicago suburb of Sauk Village.

"By the time I looked out the window it was engulfed in flames," Quinta Echols, a witness, said.

Luckily, fire crews in Sauk Village were there within minutes. But it turns out fires like this have happened dozens of times  across the country in the last few years.

Mack Julion with the National Association of Letter Carriers union knows all about it.

"We’ve been made aware of these vehicles," Julion said. "That’s why we are engaged with the postal service in dialogue to make sure they are safe."

It’s no secret the United States Postal Service has been tackling financial problems for years. This is another issue that will likely to cost millions of dollars to fix.

The small postal trucks with the drivers seat on the right hand side make up about 60 percent of the 230,000 USPS vehicle fleet.

In all, there are 140,000 of these long-life vehicles (LLVs) on the nation’s roads. A Freedom of Information Act request by WGN Investigates found that 5,872 of them are right here in Illinois.

Their average life span is supposed to be 24 years, but some of these vehicles are now pushing 32 years of visible wear and tear in the rear view. Some of them were built when Ronald Reagan was president.

Not all of them are at risk of exploding, but a 2014 memo points to “failed fuel system components” as the cause.

WGN Investigates found the postal service was also warned about other issues with the vehicles back in 2014. An Inspector General report released five years ago said the vehicles, “do not include numerous modern vehicle safety features developed to reduce accidents and injuries that are now considered standard on most vehicles.”

The IG report details 31 safety features the vehicles are lacking, like side air bags and back-up sensors.

USPS did not agree to an on-camera interview with WGN Investigates, but they did send this statement saying they’ve, “implemented mandated maintenance schedules and fine-tune repair and maintenance procedures for the existing Postal Service vehicle fleet.”

The union has also been made aware of problems with the LLVs. They’ve been working to make sure their employees safety is a priority but they don’t expect a full fleet replacement until 2021.

The U.S. Postal Service told WGN they’ve been receiving bids and proposals for new trucks and just finished a round of testing in March. They could have new trucks out on the roads by this year.