

Dealing with Anthrax and Bombs Through the Mail

The threat of bio-terrorism on a small scale is currently being investigated by the FBI, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other public health organizations. The threat of anthrax and other diseases has been included in numerous letters received by organizations. It would appear however that, on this occasion, the threat may be real.

Whether the threat is from bio-terrorism or from mail bombs, planning and coordinating with emergency authorities must be done in advance. If the local Haz-Mat (Hazardous Material) and police officials have been part of the planning process, things will go smoothly. If you feel that you are at risk of such a threat:

- 1) Seek the advice of Haz-Mat in locating an area to open mail within your facility.
- 2) Arrange for a request for Haz-Mat assistance to your facility to be made without the use of a 911 call (use a direct phone number to a fire chief's office or police department).

The receipt, opening, and handling of packages is a basic function within any organization. Organizations can protect their personnel by taking the following steps to establish a comprehensive program for handling mail:

- 1) Centralize mailing opening so that only one person in an organization (or organizational unit) needs to be trained on how to recognize potentially dangerous material.
- 2) Triage the mail and packages. Mail and packages should be separated into:
 - a) Mail and packages that are from a known source that can be opened immediately
 - b) Mail and packages that are unsolicited and may be suspicious.
 - c) Mail and packages that are best described as junk mail and can be discarded
- 3) Isolate the mail that has is unsolicited and may be suspicious.
 - a) Packages have the potential of containing an explosive device.
 - b) Letters have the possibility of containing a biological (anthrax) threat.
- 4) Investigate further: Hold envelopes up to a strong light to view contents. Track the return address (if one is present) to verify the legitimacy of the envelope or package.
- 5) Compare unsolicited packages to the ATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) publication *Detecting Suspicious Packages/Letters* (see attached).
- 6) If a metal detector is available (effective metal detectors are available through police supply catalogues), check for the presence of metal (wiring, pipe, battery, etc.) If metal is detected:
 - a) Isolate the letter or package to an area where an explosion would cause the fewest injuries to people and the least damage to the facility.

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- b) Evacuate the area.
- c) Contact local law enforcement officials immediately.
- 7) **When in doubt, throw it out. Contact your local law enforcement agency.**
- 8) In most cases, mail and packages without metal can be safely opened in a controlled environment.
 - a) The location where the mail is opened should be identified in advance with the assistance of Haz-Mat personnel. An exterior area sheltered from the wind or a room with a closed door may be satisfactory.
 - b) The person opening the mail should wear rubber gloves and apron.
 - c) If a sealed laboratory glove box is available, open the mail in the sealed box.
 - d) If a laboratory glove box is not available, to minimize the risk of airborne dispersion of dangerous spores, immerse the letter in a container of water. Open the letter and identify its contents while it is underwater.
 - e) Non-suspicious letters can be disposed of or air dried.
 - f) If the letter indicates that the envelope contains anthrax spores or other dangerous material (many do), place a weight on the letter to keep it submerged.
 - g) If the letter contains any type of an unknown substance, place a weight on the envelope and material to keep it submerged.
- 9) The person opening the mail should use anti-bacterial soap to wash hands immediately after opening the mail.
- 10) If anything suspicious is found, contact local law enforcement officials immediately.
- 11) Many unsolicited letters and packages that arrive with no traceable return address can be disposed of without opening.
- 12) **When in doubt, throw it out.**

In addition to the local police and Haz-Mat the following phone numbers may be of use:

National Response Center	(800)424-8802
CDC Emergency Response Coordination Group	(770)488-7100

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Detecting Suspicious Packages/Letters

REMEMBER

**The item does not have to be delivered by a carrier.
Most bombers set up and deliver the bomb themselves.**

1. If delivered by carrier, inspect for lumps, bulges, or protrusions, without applying pressure.
2. If delivered by carrier, balance check if lopsided or heavy sided.
3. Handwritten addresses or labels from companies are improper. Check to see if the company exists and if they sent a package or letter.
4. Packages wrapped in string are automatically suspicious, as modern packaging materials have eliminated the need for twine or string.
5. Excess postage on small packages or letters indicates that the object was not weighed by the Post Office.
6. No postage or non-canceled postage.
7. Any foreign writing, addresses, or postage.
8. Handwritten notes, such as: "To Be Opened in the Privacy of" "CONFIDENTIAL" - "Your Lucky Day is Here" - "Prize Enclosed".
9. Improper spelling of common names, places, or titles.
10. Generic or incorrect titles.
11. Leaks, stains, or protruding wires, string, tape, etc.
12. Hand delivered or dropped off for a friend packages or letters.
13. No return address or nonsensical return address.
14. Any letters or packages arriving before or after a phone call from an unknown person asking if the item was received.
15. If you have a suspicious letter or package.

Call: 911-ISOLATE-EVACUATE

Bombs

Bombs can be constructed to look like almost anything and can be placed or delivered in any number of ways. The probability of finding a bomb that looks like the stereotypical bomb is almost nonexistent. The only common denominator that exists among bombs is that they are designed or intended to explode.

Most bombs are homemade and are limited in their design only by the imagination of, and resources available to, the bomber. Remember, when searching for a bomb, suspect anything that looks unusual. Let the trained bomb technician determine what is or is not a bomb.