

Handling and Processing Mail Safely

Screen all mail and packages for suspicious items when they first arrive at your mailroom for sorting. Staff who sort mail by hand should perform the screening, as they are the ones most likely to notice a suspicious item. Unfortunately, screening procedures for incoming mail and packages are not foolproof. The person who first detects a suspicious letter or package is often not the intended recipient.

Prominently display a list of suspicious letter and package indicators in your mailroom and provide a copy of the list to all staff to ensure they're familiar with it. The Postal Inspection Service's Poster 84, *Suspicious Mail or Packages*, illustrates key characteristics of a suspicious or potentially dangerous mail item.

Establish a letter and package bomb-screening program

- Evaluate your organization to determine if your business or an employee is a potential target.
- Appoint a mail center security coordinator and an alternate to be responsible for your screening plan and to ensure compliance.
- Establish lines of communication between the mail center security coordinator, management, and the security office.
- Develop screening procedures for all incoming letter and package deliveries. Train employees in the procedures.
- Develop handling procedures for items identified as suspicious and dangerous.
- Develop procedures for confirming the contents of suspicious letters and packages identified through screening.
- Establish procedures for isolating suspicious letters and packages.
- Train mail center, security, and management staff to validate all phases of your letter and package bomb-screening program. **What are the roles and responsibilities of the mail center security coordinator relative to letter and package bomb safety?**
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Postal Inspectors recommend including the mail center manager, or a designee, as a member of the group that develops your Bomb Threat Response Plan. Corporate management should ensure the mail center security coordinator and alternate are mature, responsible, and emotionally stable. They should be trained in the Bomb Threat Response Plan.

What about bomb threats received in writing?

Written threats provide physical evidence that must be protected from contamination. Written threats and any envelopes in which they are received should be placed under clear plastic covers. All circumstances of their receipt should be recorded.

What about bomb threats received by phone?

Phone threats offer an opportunity to obtain more detailed information, perhaps even the caller's identity. For that reason, your receptionist or others who take calls from the public should be trained to remain calm and to solicit as much information as possible. The bomber's intentions may be to damage property, not to injure or kill anyone. If so, the person receiving the call may be able to obtain useful information before the caller ends the conversation.

- Keep the caller on the line, ask him or her to repeat the message several times, and gather more information, such as caller ID.
- Write down the threat verbatim, using the caller's own words, and record any other information.
- Don't hang up under any circumstances!
- Ask corporate and security management to decide on the proper response, such as evacuation.
- Notify police and the fire department immediately.

Poster 84

SUSPICIOUS MAIL OR PACKAGES

Protect yourself, your business, and your mailroom.

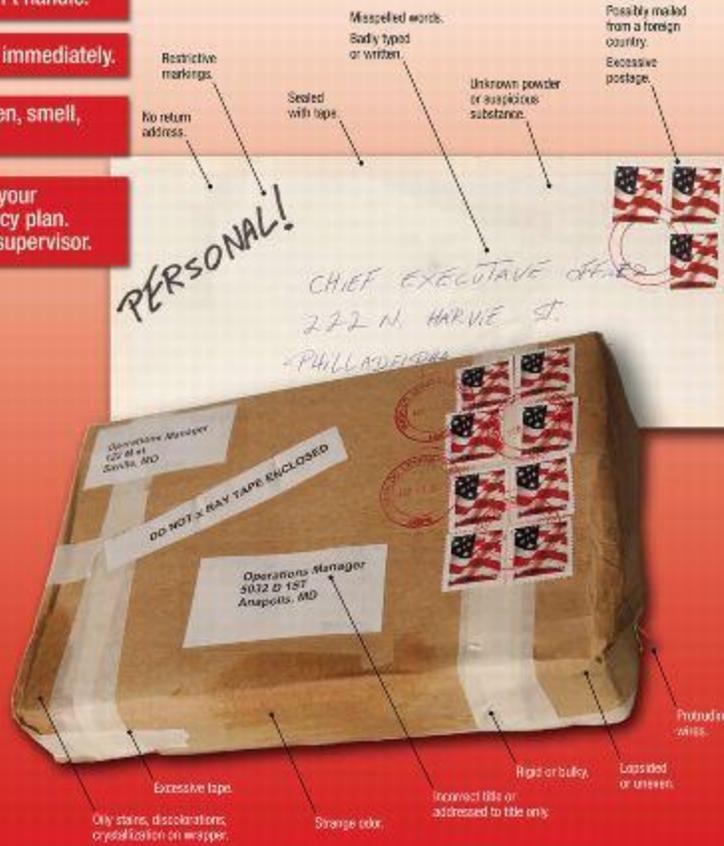
If you receive a suspicious letter or package:

• Stop. Don't handle.

• Isolate it immediately.

• Don't open, smell, or taste.

• Activate your emergency plan. Notify a supervisor.



If you suspect the mail or package contains a bomb (explosive), or radiological, biological, or chemical threat:

▪ Isolate area immediately ▪ Call 911 ▪ Wash your hands with soap and water



UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE



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What should employees do if they receive an unexpected mailpiece?

Because of the increased sophistication of letter or package bombs and placed devices, fewer bombs can be readily identified by examining the exterior of a mailpiece. Remind employees: If you're not expecting a letter or package, be suspicious.

If you receive an unexpected mailpiece:

- First check the return address.
- If you don't recognize the return address, contact the security office.
- The security office should attempt to contact the sender.
- Don't open the mailpiece until verification proves it's harmless.

What should the mail center security coordinator do after encountering a suspicious letter or package during screening?

Response	Action
First	Follow your local established protocols.
Inquire	Ask the employee who found the suspicious letter or package to write down the specific recognition point in the screening process that caused the alert (excessive postage, no return address, rigid or bulky, lopsided or uneven appearance, strange odor, protruding wires, oily stains, discolorations, excessive tape, etc.).
Isolate	Isolate the area where the mailpiece was found—do not touch it.
Alert	Alert employees that a suspicious letter or package has been found, what the points of recognition are, and to remain clear of the isolation area.
Notify	Inform management and security that a suspicious item has been detected by the screening process.
Document	Without touching the mailpiece, record from each visible side of the item all available information (name and address of addressee and of sender, postmark, cancellation date, types of stamps, and any other markings or labels found on the item). Copy information with exact spelling and location given on item.
Inform	Inform police (and Postal Inspectors if sent through the U.S. Mail) of all information recorded from the suspect item.

What are some questions to ask the addressee or sender during the verification process?

- Is the addressee familiar with the name and address of the sender?
- Is the addressee expecting a letter or package from the sender? If so, what's the approximate size of the item?
- Ask the sender to fully explain the circumstances surrounding the sending of the item and describe the contents. At this point, management and security must decide whether or not to proceed to open the letter or package.
- If the sender is unknown, is the addressee expecting business correspondence from the city, state, or country of origin of the item?
- Is the addressee aware of any friends, relatives, or business acquaintances currently on vacation or on business trips in the area of the return address?
- Has the addressee purchased or ordered any merchandise from a business whose parent organization might be located in the area of the return address?

If you determine the sender is unknown at that return address or the return address is fictitious, consider this scenario as an indication the letter or package may be dangerous.

What is the importance of testing contingency plans?

The Postal Inspection Service can't overemphasize the need to test contingency plans with mock suspicious parcels placed in the mail center or elsewhere in the facility. The tests should be conducted in a manner that does not alarm employees. Dress rehearsals help ensure that your lines of communication function as planned and that each person who has a role to play knows his or her part.

Test the efficiency of your emergency contingency plan by conducting scheduled tests. Hold post-test meetings to address problems and resolve them before the next test.

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MAIL CENTER SECURITY QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

For suspicious letters and packages

- First, if there is a known medical emergency or chemical reaction with the mailpiece, call 911. If you are unable to verify mail contents with the addressee or sender:
- Do not open it.
- Treat it as suspect.

- Isolate it—don't handle.
- Contact building security, if available.
- Call Postal Inspectors at 877-876-2455 (press 2) if the item was received in the U.S. Mail.

For a bomb

- Evacuate immediately.
- Call 911 for police, fire and hazmat unit.
- Call Postal Inspectors at 877-876-2455 (press 2) if the item was received in the U.S. Mail.

For chemical, biological, or radiological contamination

- Isolate it—don't handle.
- Wash your hands with soap and warm water.
- Call 911 for police, fire, and hazmat unit.
- Call Postal Inspectors at 877-876-2455 (press 2) if the item was received in the U.S. Mail.

For air contamination

- Turn off fans or ventilation units and shut down the air handling system in the building, if possible. Leave area immediately and close the door or section off the area to prevent others from entering it.
- Notify your building security official or a supervisor and call 911.
- If possible, list all people who were in the room or area. Give the list to public health authorities for any needed medical advice and to law enforcement authorities for follow-up.

For a placed device

Do not disturb. If you're unable to verify the owner:

- Evacuate immediately.
- Call 911 for police, fire, and hazmat unit.

This guide is intended only for mail center supervisors and their employees.

877-876-2455 press 5

postalinspectors.uspis.gov

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Chemical, Biological, or Radiological Threats

Biological threats may include the following substances:

Chemical

- Any substance designed or intended to cause death or serious bodily injury through the release, dissemination, or impact of toxic or poisonous chemicals, or their precursors, such as mustard gas, nerve agents, and sarin gas.

Biological

- Any substance involving a disease organism, such as smallpox, botulinum toxin, anthrax, and ricin.

Radiological

- Any substance designed to release radiation.

Ricin

There have been a few incidents of mail purporting to contain the chemical poison ricin.

Ricin is made from castor beans, a plant that is plentiful in many areas of the world, including the United States. Castor beans are used to make castor oil and other beneficial products used for many purposes. In fact, castor oil is often used in

the manufacture of paper, including paper used as envelopes. Trace amounts of castor are present in many common items. The process for making ricin from castor beans is rather difficult and quite dangerous. To cause harm, ricin must be injected, inhaled, or ingested.

How to Limit Exposure to a Suspicious Substance in the Mail?

- Develop an emergency plan in response to a known or possible exposure to a suspicious substance.
- Train workers how to recognize and handle a suspicious letter or package.
- Identify a single point of contact to open mail.
- Screen all mail for suspicious letters or packages.
- Do not open mail in an area where other personnel are present.
- If appropriate, have personal-protective equipment (gloves, masks, etc.) available for employees who handle mail.

What should you do if you receive a suspicious substance by U.S. Mail?

Step	Action
1.	Above all else, follow your local established protocols. Notify your supervisor.
2.	If there is a known medical emergency or chemical reaction to the mailpiece, call 911 and then call Postal Inspectors at 877-876-2455 (press 2).
3.	If there is no known medical emergency or chemical reaction, call Postal Inspectors at 877-876-2455 (press 2).
4.	Isolate the damaged or suspicious letter or package. Cordon off the immediate area.
5.	Ensure that anyone who touched the mailpiece washes his or her hands with soap and water.
6.	List everyone who touched the mailpiece. Include contact information and have the information available for authorities. If asked, provide the information to first responders.
7.	Follow first responders' instructions on decontamination procedures.

You can find more guidance on suspected chemical, biological, or radiological contamination from the Centers for Disease Control at cdc.gov

Anthrax

Anthrax is a bacterial disease caused by *Bacillus (B.) anthracis*. In humans, three types of anthrax infections can occur based on the route of exposure.

For detailed recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) on protective gear for your employees, contact your local CDC representative or visit cdc.gov.

Anthrax Characteristics

Type	Exposure	Transmittal & Characteristics	Symptoms
Cutaneous	Skin	The most common, naturally occurring anthrax infection. May be transmitted via skin contact with contaminated meat, wool, hides, or leather from infected animals. Incubation is from 1 to 12 days. Infection occurs through scratches or skin abrasions.	Infection appears as a raised bump resembling a spider bite. Within 1 to 2 days, it develops into a blister and then a painless ulcer, with a black necrotic (dying) area in the center. The lesion may cause fever, malaise, and headache. Lymph glands in the area may swell.
Inhalation	Inhalation	Anthrax spores must be aerosolized to cause inhalational anthrax. It is contracted by inhaling spores and occurs in workers handling infected animal hides, wool, and fur. The number of spores that cause infection is unknown. Incubation period is unclear, but may range from 1 to 7 days or up to 60 days.	Inhalation anthrax resembles a viral respiratory illness. Initial symptoms include sore throat, mild fever, muscle aches, and malaise. Symptoms may progress to respiratory failure and shock with meningitis. After incubation of 1 to 7 days, the onset of inhalation anthrax is gradual.
Gastro-intestinal	Ingestion	Gastrointestinal anthrax usually follows consumption of raw or undercooked contaminated meat and has an incubation period of 1 to 7 days.	Causes acute inflammation of the intestinal tract. Initial signs are nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, fever followed by abdominal pain, vomiting of blood, and severe diarrhea.

MAIL CENTER EMERGENCY NUMBERS

JUNEAU POLICE DEPARTMENT

586-0600

US POSTAL INSPECTOR

907-562-8790

JUNEAU FIRE DEPARTMENT

586-5322