

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION

DIVISION OF GENERAL SERVICES

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GUIDELINES

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Suspicious Mail or Parcels

Purpose: The purpose of these guidelines is to provide managers with information to design a course of action for avoiding or minimizing employee contact with harmful substances delivered through mail or other delivery services.

1. Delivery Acceptance Standards

Sources that bring mail and parcels into the state system are the U.S. Postal Service, state government interagency mail system, private couriers and delivery services, and individuals. While it is the policy of the state to maintain normal business operations, additional security measures may be necessary to ensure safety for employees. Additional measures include the following:

- Accept mail or parcels only from known sources. If your staff are unsure about the identification of a delivery person, they should ask to see credentials.
- Staff should not touch or move mail or parcels that are left unattended on docks, in lobbies, or on desks. Try to determine where the item came from, and then contact the sending party by phone to confirm the content. If staff cannot determine where it came from, they should **call 911** and have the items picked up for proper handling.

2. Mail Handlers

There are two types of mail handlers in state government. There are Mail Sorters and Transporters that work in central mail operations whose primary job is to receive, sort, and transport mail to other locations. There are Mail Openers and Processors who work in operations that require them to open, process, and deliver mail to others in the same location.

Mail Sorters/Transporters

Employees in mailrooms are generally exposed to a greater variety and volume of mail than employees in small offices. They receive

mail from the U.S. Postal Service, delivery services, and from individuals. Their job is to sort, rout, and transport mail to other locations. They usually do not open or process mail for the agency. Their focus in identifying suspicious materials is primarily the way a parcel or letter is packaged. They are most likely to notice suspicious external characteristics of a letter or parcel.

Mail Openers/Processors

Employees who open, process, and deliver mail in a local area are in a position to recognize suspicious packaging as well as suspicious contents. Because they are more closely connected to the business operations of an agency, they have the advantage of recognizing a parcel or letter that is not from an expected source. They know what type of mail is “normal” for their operation.

However, they are also at a greater risk of contamination. Those who open mail must be particularly careful when opening mail or packages, and be alert to substances such as powder, blotters, or unidentified loose material.

Until further notice please have your Mail Openers not only open the mail but look inside and if no suspicious material appears then extract the documents, paperclip to the envelope for the recipient before the mail is distributed.

Please provide all employees, who open mail, with immediate access to non-powered, non-latex gloves and instruct the staff to wear them during the mail opening process until otherwise instructed.

Please provide all employees who open mail with immediate access to one-gallon size clear plastic zip-lock bags and large plastic garbage bags to contain suspicious parcels should any be discovered.

Both types of mail handlers are potentially at risk for hazards arriving in the mail or through couriers. Both groups must know what to look for and how to respond to suspicious mail or packages and the contamination that may accompany them. The following section outlines characteristics of suspicious mail and packages.

3. Identifying Suspicious Mail

Please refer to and post, in a conspicuous location for your mail handlers, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Health Advisory distributed October 12, 2001.

4. Other Guidelines Agencies need to implement for handling Mail

Each agency needs to implement the following policies for handling mail:

- Provide all employees, who open mail, with immediate access to non-powdered, non-latex gloves and instruct the staff to wear them during the mail opening process until otherwise instructed.
- Provide all employees who open mail with immediate access to one gallon clear plastic zip-lock bags and large plastic garbage bags to contain any suspicious parcels should they be discovered.
- Limiting the number of areas where mail is opened.
- Opening mail addressed to high profile positions or programs in a designated mail screening area
- Applying the same cautionary standards to interagency mail as used for federal mail.

This is an official CDC Health Advisory
Distributed via Health Alert Network
October 12, 2001, 21:00 EDT (9:00 PM EDT)

HOW TO HANDLE ANTHRAX AND OTHER BIOLOGICAL AGENT THREATS

Many facilities in communities around the country have received anthrax threat letters. Most were empty envelopes; some have contained powdery substances. The purpose of these guidelines is to recommend procedures for handling such incidents.

DO NOT PANIC

1. Anthrax organisms can cause infection in the skin, gastrointestinal system, or the lungs. To do, so the organism must be rubbed into abraded skin, swallowed, or inhaled as a fine, aerosolized mist. Disease can be prevented after exposure to the anthrax spores by early treatment with the appropriate antibiotics. Anthrax is not spread from one person to another person.
2. For anthrax to be effective as a covert agent, it must be aerosolized into very small particles. This is difficult to do, and requires a great deal of technical skill and special equipment. If these small particles are inhaled, life-threatening lung infection can occur, but prompt recognition and treatment are effective.

SUSPICIOUS UNOPENED LETTER OR PACKAGE MARKED WITH A THREATENING MESSAGE SUCH AS "ANTHRAX":

1. Do not shake or empty the contents of any suspicious envelope or package.
2. PLACE the envelope or package in a plastic bag or some other type of container to prevent leakage of contents.
3. If you do not have any container, then COVER the envelope or package with anything (e.g., clothing, paper, trash can, etc.) and do not remove this cover.
4. Then LEAVE the room and CLOSE the door, or section off the area to prevent others from entering (i.e., keep others away).
5. WASH your hands with soap and water to prevent spreading any powder to your face.
6. What to do next...
 - If you are at HOME, then report the incident to local police.
 - If you are at WORK, then report the incident to local police, and notify your building security official or an available supervisor.
7. LIST all people who were in the room or area when this suspicious letter or package was recognized. Give this list to both the local public health authorities and law enforcement officials for follow-up investigations and advice.

ENVELOPE WITH POWDER AND POWDER SPILLS OUT ONTO SURFACE:

1. DO NOT try to CLEAN UP the powder. COVER the spilled contents immediately with anything (e.g., clothing, paper, trash can, etc.) and do not remove this cover!
2. Then LEAVE the room and CLOSE the door, or section off the area to prevent others from entering (i.e., keep others away).
3. WASH your hands with soap and water to prevent spreading any powder to your face.
4. What to do next...
 - If you are at HOME, then report the incident to local police.
 - If you are at WORK, then report the incident to local police, and notify your building security official or an available supervisor.
5. REMOVE heavily contaminated clothing as soon as possible and place in a plastic bag, or some other container that can be sealed. This clothing bag should be given to the emergency responders for proper handling.
6. SHOWER with soap and water as soon as possible. Do Not Use Bleach Or Other Disinfectant On Your Skin.
7. If possible, list all people who were in the room or area, especially those who had actual contact with the powder. Give this list to both the local public health authorities so that proper instructions can be given for medical follow-up, and to law enforcement officials for further investigation.

QUESTION OF ROOM CONTAMINATION BY AEROSOLIZATION:

For example: small device triggered, warning that air handling system is contaminated, or warning that a biological agent released in a public space.

1. Turn off local fans or ventilation units in the area.
2. LEAVE area immediately.
3. CLOSE the door, or section off the area to prevent others from entering (i.e., keep others away).
4. What to do next...
 - If you are at HOME, then dial "911" to report the incident to local police and the local FBI field office.
 - If you are at WORK, then dial "911" to report the incident to local police and the local FBI field office, and notify your building security official or an available supervisor.
5. SHUT down air handling system in the building, if possible.
6. If possible, list all people who were in the room or area. Give this list to both the local public health authorities so that proper instructions can be given for medical follow-up, and to law enforcement officials for further investigation.

HOW TO IDENTIFY SUSPICIOUS PACKAGES AND LETTERS

Some characteristics of suspicious packages and letters include the following...

- Excessive postage
- Handwritten or poorly typed addresses
- Incorrect titles
- Title, but no name
- Misspellings of common words
- Oily stains, discolorations or odor
- No return address
- Excessive weight
- Lopsided or uneven envelope
- Protruding wires or aluminum foil
- Excessive security material such as masking tape, string, etc.
- Visual distractions
- Ticking sound
- Marked with restrictive endorsements, such as "Personal" or "Confidential"
- Shows a city or state in the postmark that does not match the return address