

SAFETY ALERT

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Guidance for Handling Mail and Threat Letters or Packages

Various locations around the country have, and continue to receive threat letters through the mail. These letters may state that you have been exposed to anthrax or other biological materials. Additionally, these envelopes or packages may contain some type of powder or granules. The following information and recommendations collected from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the U.S. Postal Service, are being provided to help you safely and effectively handle these types of incidents.

Suspicious Mail

All campus personnel should maintain an enhanced awareness of receipt of suspicious letters or packages. Suspicious mail can have the following characteristics:

- It has a powdery substance on the outside.
- It is unexpected or from someone unfamiliar.
- It is addressed to someone no longer with the organization or is otherwise outdated.
- It has no return address, or one that cannot be verified as legitimate.
- It is of unusual weight given its size, or is lopsided or oddly shaped.
- It has an unusual amount of tape on it.
- It is marked with restrictive endorsements such as "Personal" or "Confidential".
- It has unusual odors or stains.
- The city or state in the return address does not match the postmark.

Dealing with Receipt

Do not blow into any envelope. If suspicious mail is received, employees should:

- Not open or shake the package or envelope.
- Isolate the piece by carefully putting it down on top of your desk, by placing it in a plastic bag, or by putting it into a covered container.
- Evacuate the immediate area.
- Call Security at X2019 and Safety at X4150.
- Wash hands thoroughly.
- Prevent others from entering the area, but remain near the workplace.
- Provide a list of people in the area.

Opening a Letter or Package

If a letter or package has threatening messages:

- Replace contents and place in a plastic bag or cover.
- Wash your hands with soap and water.
- Prevent others from entering the area.
- Call Security at X2019 and Safety at X4150 and wait for emergency responders to arrive.

If a letter or package contains powder or granules, remain calm; do not panic, and:

- Place everything in a plastic bag or cover with clothing.
- Ask everyone to leave the area and have them call Security at X2019 and Safety at X4150.
- Wash your hands with soap and water.
- Wait for emergency responders.

Spilled Powders

If powder spills from an envelope or package onto a surface:

- Do not try to clean up the powder.
- Cover the powder with anything and do not remove the cover.
- Leave the room and keep others away.
- Report the incident to Security at X2019 and Safety at X4150.
- Remove heavily contaminated clothing as soon as possible and put it in a container that can be sealed so the clothing can be given to emergency responders for proper handling.
- Shower with soap and water as soon as possible.
- Make a list of people in the room or area where the package was recognized and provide this to emergency responders.

Aerosol Release

If there is a small explosion or release of an aerosol spray from a package:

- Vacate the space immediately and prevent others from entering.
- Call Security at X2019 and Safety at X4150 immediately and remain on the premises to provide information to emergency responders.
- Wash your hands and face with soap and water.
- Remove affected clothing and save in a bag.
- Shower as soon as possible.

General Comments and Basic Infection Control

We are assured by the experts that the individual current risk of exposure to Anthrax by mail is low. They are basing this conclusion on the number of pieces of mail that are handled each year (208 billion pieces), and the few confirmed cases so far. Nevertheless, we should all remain informed and alert. In general, for an infectious agent to cause illness, it must make contact with the body. It must be capable of causing a disease and there must be sufficient quantity to cause disease. The host's resistance may also come into play.

Routes of exposure to infectious agents are: contact, ingestion and inhalation. Avoiding contact means not getting it on your skin or in your eyes. Avoid bringing your hands to your face, eyes, or mouth. Avoid applying cosmetics in the workplace. Wash your hands after you complete tasks and before you eat. Avoid eating or drinking at your workstation will help reduce potential infection by ingestion. Removing yourself from an area where there has been an aerosol release of infectious agents is one way of reducing the likelihood of inhaling an infectious agent. These simple things can help you reduce potential infection.

If you would like more information on infection control, or any information presented in this Alert, please contact EH&S at X4150.