

ALBUQUERQUE FIRE DEPARTMENT Standard Operating Guidelines FIRE CHIEF'S DIRECTIVES	Guidelines for Response to Letters/Packages Containing Chemical, Biological, and/or Radiological Agents/Device Directive 11 10/01 Page 1 of 6
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PURPOSE:

Guidelines for response to Letters/Packages Containing Chemical, Biological, and/or Radiological Agents/Device.

SITUATION:

In light of recent events, law enforcement and fire/haz-mat personnel throughout the country have been inundated with requests to assist in the handling of mail that has been deemed suspicious by private citizens and businesses. It should be noted that none of our agencies are typically involved with handling private mail. However, due to the heightened state of awareness regarding anthrax, the public has consequently developed a fear of handling "suspicious" mail. It is important that we are both responsive to the community and prudent in the use of its resources.

The following guidance has been compiled from information obtained through the U.S. Postal Service, FBI Bomb Data Center, Center for Disease Control, and the cooperation of the NM Weapons of Mass Destruction Working Group. This information provides the public and first responders with guidance for handling suspicious mail situations. It incorporates public information with New Mexico Emergency Responder Guidance. Each incident is unique and may require some deviation from these guidelines.

This guidance may be periodically updated. The most current information may be viewed on the NM Weapons of Mass Destruction Preparedness Web Site at <http://www.wmd-nm.org>.

OVERVIEW

Considerations:

- Anthrax spores are usually only harmful if inhaled, ingested, or when introduced into an open wound or the eyes.
- Anthrax will likely be visible as a light beige to ash color, which tends to cling to the sides of the container.
- Persons exposed to anthrax are **not contagious**, and do not require quarantine.

Exposure:

The risk of exposure is greatest for the few people who handled the letter/package **after** it was opened, or those in the immediate area at the time the envelope was open.

Symptoms:

- Incubation period is 1-6 days before symptoms are noticed.
- Fever, malaise, cough with chest discomfort, fatigue, followed by severe respiratory distress with dyspnea, sweating and cyanosis.

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Treatment:

- Vaccine available but requires series of six injections over 18 months with annual boosters.
- High dose antibiotics, (ciprofloxacin, doxycycline), available after an exposure, most useful in the very early stage of the disease.

MAIL RECIPIENT CONSIDERATIONS

Your first indication of a suspicious letter or package may be:

- Irregularities in shape or size
- No return address
- Inaccurate mailing information
- Incorrect names and titles
- Misspellings of common words
- Excessive postage, stains or discolorations.

Minimum Criteria for Credible Threat by Mail:

- A letter or package with **material present** (opened/unopened)
 - Powder spilling, substance leaking or staining.
- A letter or package with an **articulated threat** (opened or unopened)
 - Substance need not be present.

Mail that is Not Considered a Credible Threat:

- Mail that does not meet the criteria listed above
 - An unopened letter or package with **no material or threat observable**.
 - This mail does not need to be reported to local law enforcement or FBI.

WHAT TO DO IF THE LETTER/PACKAGE MEETS THE MINIMUM CRITERIA FOR A CREDIBLE THREAT

- If you suspect an explosive device then **LEAVE** the room and **CLOSE** the door and call 911.

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- Do not shake or empty the contents of any suspicious envelope or package; DO NOT try to clean up powders or fluids.
- Place the envelope or package in a plastic bag or some other type of container to prevent leakage of contents.
- If you do not have any container, then COVER the envelope or package with anything (e.g., clothing, paper, trashcan, etc.) and do not remove this cover.
- Then LEAVE the room and CLOSE the door, or section off the area to prevent others from entering (**keep others away**).
- WASH your hands with soap and water to prevent spreading any powder to your face or skin.
- 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.
- If possible, 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.
- Remove heavily contaminated clothing and place in a plastic bag that can be sealed; give the bag to law enforcement personnel. Shower with soap and water as soon as possible. Do not use bleach or disinfectant on your skin.

RESPONDERS ACTIONS

Upon notification of an incident, **APD dispatchers and APD/AFD/FBI responders** should conduct the following preliminary investigation.

Albuquerque Police Department

- APD call taker will determine if there is an articulated or implied **threat** regarding a chemical, biological or radiological agent/device. If so, minimum criteria met for a credible threat, contact the FBI (505) 224-2000.
- APD call taker will determine if there is **material** present. If so, do not smell, taste or touch the material. Is there an explanation for the material? Did anyone actually see material? Is there a logical explanation for the material? If there is no logical explanation, minimum criteria met for a credible threat, contact the FBI, the New Mexico State Police, and transfer the call to AFD Alarm. AFD will dispatch the closest unit, haz-mat squad, and a Battalion Commander.
- If no material/threat is present APD call taker will ask the following questions.
 - Is the letter/package "suspicious" because it is unfamiliar?
 - Is there a return address?
 - Has the recipient contacted the return address and asked them what they sent?

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- Is the return address a reputable company conducting normal business?
- APD call taker will determine if the open or unopened letter/package contains no threat or material, but the recipient is concerned, instruct the recipient to dispose of the letter/package him/herself in a sealed plastic bag.

Albuquerque Fire Department

- Stage equipment uphill and upwind.
- Secure the area, isolate, and deny entry.
- Contain and control suspicious material.
- Responders can be protected from anthrax spores by donning **splash protection (level B), rubber gloves and SCBA.**
- AFD Emergency responders coordinate with the hazardous waste cleanup contractor (ReinChem, 345-3655) to collect all suspicious material and package according to CDC guidelines for the FBI.
- The FBI will coordinate the collection of evidence with responders. AFD Emergency responders will coordinate with the hazardous waste cleanup contractor the collection of evidence for the FBI.
- Decontamination:
 - Victims who may have handled container or are in the immediate area and are potentially contaminated should be decontaminated with soap and water, no bleach solutions are required.
 - Strip, identify and bag clothes and personal items, give to **FBI**, utilize tyvec suits for victim's modesty.
 - Remove any contamination from exposed skin and hair with soap/shampoo and water.
 - A 1:10 dilution of household bleach (1 quart bleach to 2.5 gallons of water) should only be used on equipment and there is confirmation of the agent.
- Instruct individuals that if they become ill (flu-like symptoms) before laboratory results are available, they should immediately contact a hospital emergency department where they should inform the staff of their potential exposure.

Federal Bureau of Investigation

If the matter is suspected to be an act of terrorism involving a Weapon of Mass Destruction (biological, chemical, radiological, nuclear, explosive or combination), the FBI Field Office will contact the WMD Coordinator or investigator(s) who will conduct a conference call with responders at the scene, New Mexico Department of Health and possibly the FBI's Hazardous Materials Response Unit.

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If the conference call determines the item is still suspected of being an act of terrorism, the letter/package must be field screened prior to transportation to the New Mexico Department of Health Scientific Laboratory (State Lab) in Albuquerque. See Field Screen Guidance below.

FIELD SCREEN GUIDELINES

The **New Mexico State Police** will coordinate the appropriate initial response and field screening of a suspected WMD. Field Screening insures the safety of all involved: responders, transporting agent, and laboratory personnel. Bomb Tech Personnel, and Hazardous Materials Responders are responsible for donning the appropriate personal protective gear prior to field screening.

The Following field screening must be conducted prior to sending a sample to the State Lab.

- X-ray the letter/package for explosives/device. (Law Enforcement)
- PH survey and combustible vapors survey. (Law Enforcement)
- Radioactivity survey.

PACKAGING AND TRANSPORTING PROTOCOL

Incorporates CDC Guidelines for State Health Departments – Revised 10/14/01

- Packaging and labeling specimens (suspicious material) is the same as for any infectious substance.
- FBI will coordinate the collection of evidence with responders.
- Emergency Responder (in appropriate Personal Protective Equipment) will collect all suspicious material and package according to packaging guideline below.
- If the specimen is a dry powder or paper material, place it in a zip-lock bag and label it with a biohazard label.
- Place this container into a second leak-proof container with a tight cover that is labeled “biohazard”. The size of the second container should be no larger than a one-gallon paint can.

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- Place the second container into a third leak proof container with a tight cover that is labeled “biohazard.” The size of the third container should be no larger than a five-gallon paint can.
- All containers should meet state and federal regulations for transport of hazardous material and be properly labeled.