

# Suspicious Package or Letter Protocol

## Characteristics of a Suspicious Package

Historically, the likelihood of receiving a package or letter containing suspicious substances or devices is remote. It is important to be alert for suspicious packages, but keep in mind that a letter or package containing a mail bomb or biological or chemical threat is an extremely rare occurrence. To illustrate just how rare, each year the U.S. Postal Service processes approximately 200 billion pieces of mail. Of those billions of pieces of mail, only a very limited number of letters or packages contain an explosive or biological or chemical hazard.

While the risk of receiving an explosive device or contracting any disease from the mail is extremely low, it is important that we remain vigilant in taking precautions against this potential threat. Some indicators for determining suspicious packages and letters include, but are not limited to the following:

- Foreign mail, air mail and special delivery, especially when the recipient is not expecting such mail
- Handwritten or poorly typed addresses
- Lack of a return address or fictitious return address
- Misspelling of the title, (i.e., General, etc.), title only or wrong title with name
- Misspellings of common words
- Distorted handwriting or "cut & paste" lettering
- Cancellation or postmark and return address indicating different locations
- Excessive or inadequate postage
- Restrictive labeling such as "Personal, Private"
- Markings such as "Fragile-Handle With Care" or "Rush-Do Not Delay" or "Deliver by Date/Time"
- Visual Distractions such as money or pornography
- Unusual size or shape (uneven or lopsided)
- Tube-type packages heavier at one end
- Unprofessional or sloppy wrapping
- Excessive security material such as masking tape or string
- Protruding wires, aluminum foil, oily stains or discoloration
- Unfamiliar couriers delivering official looking packages to specific individuals
- Peculiar odor
- Package is unusually heavy for size
- Buzzing or ticking noise or sloshing sound
- Rigid or soft spots
- Pressure or resistance noted while removing contents of envelope or parcel

## What you should do if you receive a suspicious parcel in the mail

- Remain calm. Notify your supervisor.
- Do NOT use a cell phone or dispatch or key a "walkie-talkie" type radio.
- Do not excessively handle or open a suspicious package, as they are usually designed to withstand handling in the mail and activate when opened or when an item is removed.
- Avoid sniffing the package or tasting any substance associated with it.
- Isolate the package/letter and leave the area. Close the door.
- Secure the area to prevent others from entering.
- Wash hands immediately with soap and water to prevent the spread of contamination.
- Attempt to verify the sender and/or the legitimacy of the package (i.e., ask the recipient if he/she was expecting a package that matches the suspect package's size and shape.)

- If the package or letter remains suspect, call the Penn Police at 5-1-1 from any campus phone, or 215-573-3333 from an off-campus phone and report that you have received a parcel in the mail that is suspicious.

If smoke, visible fumes, or strange odors are emitting from the package, or if people are exhibiting signs of illness, including difficulty breathing, or fumes are strong, activate the buildings fire alarm, evacuate the building and call the Penn Police at 5-1-1 from any campus phone, or 215-573-3333 from an off-campus phone.

### **Upon Arrival, the Penn Police Commander/Supervisor Will**

- Confer with the affected staff member and Building Administrator or designee.
- Attempt to verify the contents of the package or letter with sender.
- Gather workplace intelligence, i.e. recent terminations, previous threats, domestic violence issues, stalking issues, etc.
- Make a determination to evacuate the affected floor or floors.
- Ensure that the Philadelphia Police Department (PPD) is contacted to notify the responsible police district commander/supervisor and the Ordinance Disposal Unit if police determine that the parcel is suspicious.
- Ensure that Division of Public Safety command staff members are notified.
- Assist the PPD's Ordinance Disposal Unit in sealing off areas and with additional evacuations if necessary.

### **If upon opening a letter or package you come in contact with a suspicious substance**

- Do not try to clean it up.
- Turn off fans or ventilation units in the area if possible.
- Isolate the package/letter and leave the area. Close the door.
- Secure the area to prevent others from entering.
- Wash hands immediately with soap and water to prevent the spread of contamination.
- Do not brush substance from clothing.
- If possible, remove clothing containing substance and isolate for further evaluation.
- Call the Penn Police at 5-1-1 from any campus phone, or 215-573-3333 from an off-campus phone.

### **What is Anthrax?**

Anthrax is an infectious disease caused by the spore-forming bacterium *Bacillus anthracis*. Anthrax is very rare in humans and cannot be transmitted from person to person. It can appear as a crystalline or powdery substance that may or may not be seen.

*Bacillus anthracis* is an age-old bacterium that has caused disease for centuries in the world. Infection comes from contact with anthrax-infected animals or infected animal products. The spores are found widely in soil; therefore, animals that feed on the ground tend to be those most likely infected. These animals usually include cows, sheep, and goats. Humans can contract one of three forms of *Bacillus anthracis*: cutaneous (skin), intestinal and respiratory.

Most commonly, infected people have been exposed through their work such as farmers, butchers, veterinarians, and those who sort raw wool and tan hides. Symptoms vary on exposure but can include cold and flu-type symptoms. Doctors can prescribe antibiotics for treatment of the disease. To be effective, treatment should be initiated early. If left untreated, the disease can be fatal.

**Remember, your personal safety comes first! If you are told to evacuate the building, do so immediately.**