

Guidelines for Addressing Suspicious Mail

The following guidelines have been adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov) and the United States Postal Services (www.usps.gov) specifically for the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA).

THE SCOPE

All persons should take appropriate steps to protect themselves and others from exposure to harmful chemicals and biological agents, radiation, or bombs by following these guidelines for recognizing and handling suspicious packages and letters.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Threats that may be encountered include the following:

Chemical threats: 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. Ricin also belongs to this threat category.

Ricin

There have been a few incidents of mail purporting to contain the chemical poison ricin. Ricin is made from castor beans. Castor beans are used to make castor oil and other beneficial products, including paper used as envelopes. The process for making ricin from castor beans is rather difficult and quite dangerous. To have negative health effects, ricin must be injected, inhaled, or ingested.

Biological threats: Any substance contaminated with disease causing organisms, such as *Variola* virus (causes smallpox) or *Bacillus anthracis* (causes anthrax), or microbial toxins such as botulinum toxin.

Anthrax

Anthrax is a bacterial disease caused by *Bacillus anthracis*. In humans, *B. anthracis* 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 *B. anthracis* spores by early treatment with the appropriate antibiotics. Anthrax is not spread from one person to another person.

Radiological threats: Any substance designed to release radiation.

Package Bombs (Explosives): The chance to receive a bomb through the mail is about 1 in a billion. Nonetheless, one should be aware of the proper guidelines to handle such incidents. Package bombs usually target specific individuals. Placed bombs, however, are generally intended to disrupt workplaces and injure indiscriminately. Bomb threats may target either individuals or organizations.

MAIL HANDLING TIPS:

HOW TO IDENTIFY SUSPICIOUS PACKAGES AND LETTERS

Some characteristics of suspicious packages and letters are listed below. A suspicious mail or packages poster can be found in: <http://about.usps.com/posters/pos84.pdf>.

- Excessive postage
- Handwritten or poorly typed addresses with no return address or one that you cannot confirm as legitimate
- Incorrect titles
- Title, but no name / incorrect title
- Misspellings of common words
- Marked with restrictive endorsements, such as “Personal” or “Confidential”
- Marked with any threatening language
- Shows a city or state in the postmark that does not match the return address
- Oily stains, discolorations, or odor
- Excessive weight
- Lopsided or uneven envelope, lumpy in appearance
- Protruding wires or aluminum foil
- Excessive security material, such as masking tape, string, etc.
- Visual distractions
- Ticking sound
- Powdery substance on the outside

SUSPICIOUS UNOPENED LETTER OR PACKAGE PROCEDURE:

- Do not shake or empty the contents of any suspicious envelope or package.
- Do not carry the package or envelope, show it to others, or allow others to examine it.
- Put the package or envelope on a stable surface (do not sniff, touch, taste, or look closely at it) and cover the envelope or package with anything at hand (e.g., clothing, paper, trash can, etc.)
- Alert others in the area about the suspicious package or envelope. Leave the room, close any doors, and take actions to prevent others from entering the area. If possible, shut off the ventilation system.
- Wash hands with soap and water to prevent spreading potentially infectious material to face or skin. Seek additional instructions for exposed or potentially exposed persons.
- Call the UTA Police Department at 817-272-3003 and the Environmental Health & Safety Office (EH&S) at 817-272-2185.
- If possible, create a list of persons who were in the room or area when this suspicious letter or package was recognized and a list of persons who also may have handled this package or letter. Give this list to the UTA Police Department.

ENVELOPE WITH POWDER OR POWDER SPILLS OUT OF PACKAGE:

- Do not try to clean up powder.
- Do not carry the package or envelope, show it to others, or allow others to examine it.
- Cover the contents immediately with anything at hand (e.g., clothing, paper, trash can, etc.) and do not remove this cover.
- Wash hands with soap and water to prevent spreading any powder.
- Call the UTA Police Department at 817-272-3003 and the EH&S at 817-272-2185.
- Individuals who have had direct contact with the powder will be taken to the nearest restroom to remove contaminated clothing. These individuals will be furnished with disposable coveralls. The contaminated clothing should be sealed in a plastic bag and given to the UTA Police Department or EH&S responders for proper handling.
- Individuals who have had direct contact with the powder should shower with soap and water as soon as possible. No bleach or other disinfectant should be used on skin!
- List all people who were in the room or area, especially those who had actual contact with the powder. Give this list to the UTA Police Department.

Reviewed 8-3-2023