

# **HOW TO HANDLE SUSPICIOUS MAIL**

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Suspicious mail and letters containing powder and/or purporting to contain a chemical or biological threat may be received by mail from time to time in Connecticut and other states. To prevent potential exposures and subsequent infection, all employees handling mail should know how to recognize a suspicious package or envelope and take appropriate steps to protect themselves and others.

If a package or envelope appears suspicious, **NON-EMERGENCY PERSONNEL SHOULD NOT OPEN OR TOUCH IT**. Emergency personnel should limit direct contact with the package. Ideally, only those with hazardous material training should proceed to handle the package, when cleared by a bomb technician or other appropriate emergency personnel, and only when it is deemed necessary.

The following are guidelines to respond to suspicious mail with perceived threats:

## **Some characteristics of suspicious packages and envelopes include the following:**

- Actual threat message in or on the package
- Inappropriate or unusual labeling
  - excessive postage
  - handwritten or poorly typed addresses
  - misspellings of common words
  - strange return address or no return address
  - incorrect titles or title without a name
  - not addressed to a specific person
  - marked with restrictions such as "Personal," "Confidential," "Do not x-ray"
  - marked with any threatening language
  - postmarked from a city or state that does not match the return address
- Appearance
  - powdery substance felt through or appearing on the package or envelope
  - oily stains, discolorations, or odor
  - lopsided or uneven envelope
  - excessive packaging material such as masking tape, string, etc.
- Other suspicious signs
  - excessive weight
  - ticking sound
  - protruding wires or aluminum foil

If a package or envelope appears suspicious, **DO NOT OPEN IT**.

## **Handling of suspicious packages or envelopes:**

***Step 1: Do not panic***

***Step 2: Report the incident to your supervisor***

***Step 3: Turn off the local air conditioner or fan***

***Step 4: Cover the item***

***Step 5: Secure the room and prevent others from entering***

***Step 6: Wash hands with soap and water or use bacterial wipes***

***Step 7: Move to an isolated room nearby, if possible—if not, stay at the site***

***Step 8: Obtain names and phone numbers of all persons in the area***

***Step 9: Wait for further instructions***

## **Instructions for Supervisors, Human Resources, Security:**

### ***Step 1: Do not panic***

1. Handle any item suspected of contamination with care.
2. Do not shake, bump or move it.
3. Do not open, smell or taste it.
4. Do not pull the fire alarm.

### ***Step 2: Report the incident to your supervisor***

1. Notify your supervisor and describe the incident in detail.
2. Your supervisor will immediately contact the appropriate security and human resources entities as called for in your emergency plan.
3. Appropriate authorities should be called for help.

### ***Step 3: Turn off the local air conditioner or fan.***

1. Turn off the local air conditioner or fan, if possible.
2. Law enforcement/first responders will advise whether the entire ventilation and heating system should be shut down.
3. If so, the property manager should handle this.

### ***Step 4: Cover the item.***

1. Do not walk or pass the item around. Do not call co-workers to the area.
2. If you have already handled the item, put it in a drawer.
3. If you have not handled it, cover it with anything (e.g. clothing, paper, trashcan, etc.) if this can be done safely. Do not remove the cover.

### ***Step 5: Secure the room and prevent others from entering.***

1. The area should be secured to prevent others from entering.
2. Cordon off the room/cubicle; obtain help from building security to do this, if necessary.

### ***Step 6: Wash hands with soap and water or use bacterial wipes.***

1. If there is a sink in the room, anyone who touched the item should wash their hands with soap and water.
2. If there is no sink, wipe hands with bacterial wipes.
3. As soon as practical, shower with soap and water.

### ***Step 7: Move to an isolated room nearby, if possible – if not, stay at the site..***

1. If you can leave the area and move to an alternate room nearby that is isolated, you should do so.
2. Anyone who touched the item or was in the vicinity should move to this room and wait for further instruction.
3. If no room is available, remain at the site until you receive instructions from emergency response personnel.

***Step 8: Obtain names and phone numbers of all persons in the area.***

1. List all persons who have touched the item or are in the immediate vicinity.
2. Include contact information, such as phone numbers.
3. Have this information available for law enforcement authorities and other emergency responders.

***Step 9: Wait for further instructions.***

1. If a determination is made by law enforcement authorities or emergency responders that anyone was exposed, you will be provided with further directions.
2. Once officials arrive, necessary decontamination procedures will be determined.
3. Follow-up testing for potential contamination may take between 24-48 hours.

## **SUSPICIOUS MAIL WITH PERCEIVED THREATS**

### **Summary Instructions for Supervisors, Human Resources, and/or Building Security**

*If I am called by an employee who has a suspicious letter or who has found a suspicious powder, what should I do?*

#### **Supervisor**

- Notify the building security official, Human Resources and/or other appropriate personnel under your emergency plan.
- Turn off the fan or air conditioner.
- Be sure all persons physically exposed to the substance in question remain in an area on the same floor of the building together to await further instruction re: whether decontamination is needed.
- Wait for further instructions.

#### **Human Resources / Building Security/Other Personnel designated under your emergency plan**

- Gather all information regarding the incident.
- Help assess the level of immediate security and health threat.
- Notify the appropriate authorities.
- Secure the room.
- Wait for further instructions.

This document is a collaborative effort of the Departments of Public Health, and the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection/Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security/Commission on Fire Prevention and Control.