

How to Respond to Suspicious Mail and Threat Letters or Packages Potentially Contaminated with Anthrax or Other Biological Materials

Various office 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 various sources) are being provided to help you safely and effectively handle these types of incidents.

1. Firstly, all campus personnel should maintain an enhanced awareness of receipt of suspicious letters or packages. Some common things to look for include:

- ??Packages with no return address or excessive postage.
- ??Misspellings of common words or restrictive markings such as “personal” or “confidential”.
- ??Items protruding from the envelope or package, wet areas, openings, or strange odors.
- ??Unusually heavy envelope and/or the presence of small bulges of powder or granules.

If you are concerned about a particular envelope or package, DO NOT OPEN IT. There is no risk of a release of materials or risk of exposure to you if the envelope or package remains intact. Call 911 (if on campus) or 255-1111 (if at an off campus location) and inform the emergency dispatcher that you have a suspicious envelope or package.

2. If you open an envelope or package and you find a letter that contains a threatening message or states that you have been contaminated with anthrax or some other biological substance, and no substance is found:

- ? Replace the letter in the envelope and place the envelope in a plastic bag.
- ? Wash your hands with soap and water.
- ? Call 911 or 5-1111, remain at your work location, and wait for emergency responders to arrive.

3. If you open an envelope or package and you observe some type of powder, REMAIN CALM:

- ? Slowly and carefully place the letter back in the envelope and put the envelope in a plastic bag if possible and seal it. If a plastic bag is unavailable, place the envelope on a counter or floor and cover the envelope with an empty garbage or recycling container. Do not walk around the office to show other people, nor invite co-workers to come in and take a look.
- ? Immediately wash your hands with soap and water. Extensive body decontamination (i.e., removing clothing, showering) is not indicated.
- ? Call 911 or 5-1111 immediately to report the incident, and remain in place to assist emergency responders.

4. If any powder spills out of the envelope or package:

- ? Do not clean it up yourself, and prevent others from contacting it.
- ? Do not brush off your clothes and disperse the powder into the air.
- ? Wash your hands with soap and water.
- ? Call 911 or 5-1111, inform the emergency dispatcher of the incident, and what steps you have taken.
- ? Remain in place and carefully remove your clothing and place them in a plastic bag.
- ? If possible, shower with soap and water and put on fresh clothing. It is not necessary nor is it recommended that you wash with bleach.

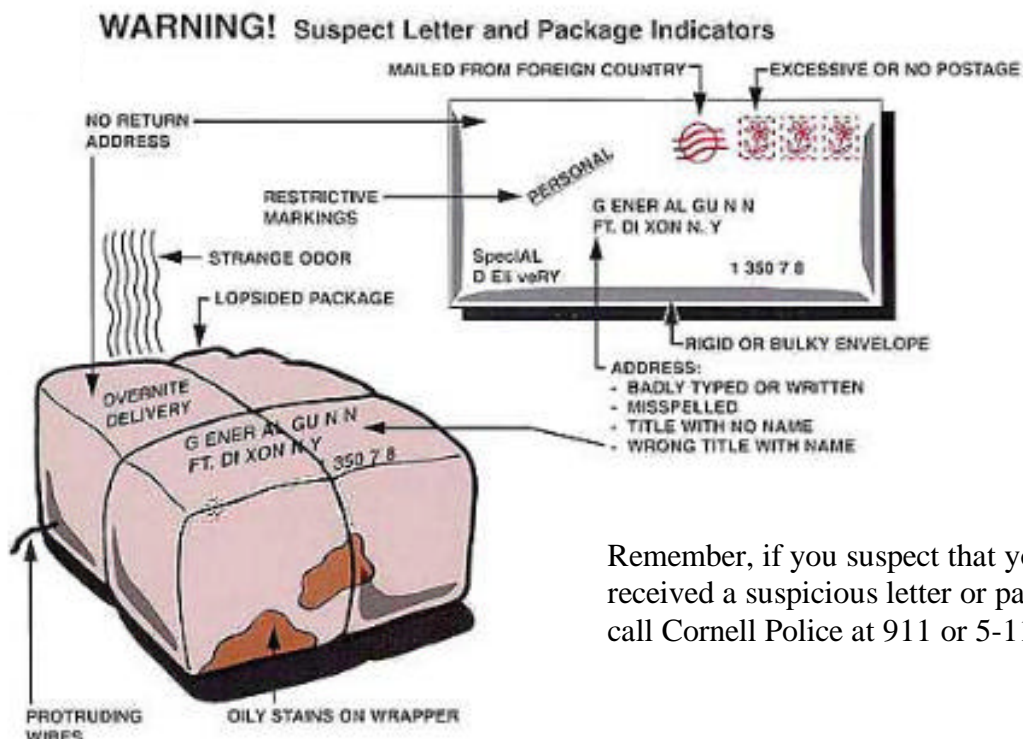
5. If there is a small explosion or release of an aerosol spray from a package:

- ? Vacate the space immediately and prevent others from entering.
- ? Call 911 or 5-1111 immediately and remain on the premises to provide information to emergency responders.
- ? Treat yourself and your clothing as in #4, above.

People who may have been present in the room, but did not directly contact the letter or substance, are at minimal risk for exposure. Individuals not in the room at the time when the envelope or package was opened are not at risk.

For biological agents to be effective terrorist agents they must be aerosolized into an extremely fine mist that can be inhaled. This is a technically difficult task. Generally, opening mail and handling biologically contaminated objects (e.g., those containing anthrax) are not sufficient activities to aerosolize particles. These organisms simply don't leap into one's body. Therefore, the likelihood of becoming infected through the inhalation route is extremely small. However, if you handle contaminated items with sores or cuts on your hands, there is a small probability that you could develop a cutaneous (skin) infection. In any scenario, prompt diagnoses and the availability of effective antibiotic treatments can lead to recovery from a potential infection. Anthrax is not contagious and cannot be transferred from person to person.

For further information, please contact Cornell Police at 255-1111 (<http://www.cupolice.cornell.edu>), Environmental Health and Safety at 255-8200 (<http://www.ehs.cornell.edu>), or Gannett at 255-5155 (<http://www.gannett.cornell.edu>).



Remember, if you suspect that you have received a suspicious letter or package, call Cornell Police at 911 or 5-1111.

Graphic courtesy of ATF
(<http://www.atf.treas.gov/explanson/information/index.htm>)