

## THE CITY OF SANTA FE

### **GUIDELINES FOR IDENTIFYING, HANDLING AND DISPOSING OF SUSPECT LETTERS AND PACKAGES**

I. The purpose of the following guidelines is to assist those involved in receiving, handling and disseminating mail and packages within state facilities to identify suspicious and potentially dangerous items; and provide procedures for safely dealing with them. These guidelines are not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to serve as an initial point of reference for mail handlers confronted with a potentially dangerous situation.

**WHEN IN DOUBT REGARDING A SUSPICIOUS LETTER OR PACKAGE, CALL 911 AND REQUEST ASSISTANCE.**

#### **A. Identifying suspicious mail:**

There are three kinds of letters/packages which pose potential threats and/or health hazards: threatening letters which do not contain suspect material or substances; letters or packages which contain material that might constitute an explosive device; and letters or packages which might contain a dangerous biological or chemical substance. Identifying and reacting to each of these three threats will be explored in greater detail below.

#### **B. Reacting to suspicious mail: R.A.I.N.**

One useful way of recalling an immediate response to the receipt of suspicious mail is the acronym **R.A.I.N.** which stands for: **R**ecognize you have a threat; **A**void the threat – step away and do not handle the package further; **I**solate yourself and others from the package; **N**otify someone that the package exists. In terms of the last step, after notifying your supervisor and/or security officer, *the next step is almost always a call to 911 to obtain police assistance.*

#### **C. What to do/What not to do**

The following are general guidelines of what to do and what not to do if you suspect a letter or package poses a threat:

- Do not shake, bump or empty the contents of a suspicious letter/package;
- Do not smell, taste or touch any material in the letter/package;
- Do not try to clean up any powders or liquids that may have fallen out of the letter/package;
- Do not touch or disconnect any wires or batteries;

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- If the letter/package is suspected to contain a biological or chemical substance, turn off all fans, air conditioners, heating and ventilation systems to the area affected;
- If the package/letter has been handled, wash your hands with soap and water;
- If a suspect material has spilled on clothing, remove the clothing immediately and if possible, place it in a plastic bag; and
- Remove yourself and others from the immediate vicinity of the suspect letter/package, and wait for the police and emergency response personnel to arrive on the scene.

### **II. Threatening letters**

A threatening letter will often be difficult to recognize until it is opened and read. It may appear innocent on the outside, but contain an explicit or implicit threat to the life of an individual such as a government official. Such letters also often contain threats to organizations or agencies with which the sender has issues. Although such letters do not normally pose an immediate danger, they should be handled carefully, as they represent potential evidence which could be used in an investigation and/or prosecution of the sender.

#### **A. What to do/What not to do**

- Once a threatening letter is identified, minimize the amount of handling it receives. The authorities will want to lift fingerprints and collect other forensic evidence from the envelope and its contents.
- If the letter was hand-delivered, try to remember and write down a physical description of the individual who delivered it, as well as any other identifying information, such as make/model of car, license plate number, etc.
- Do not talk about the letter to anyone but your supervisors and law enforcement authorities.

### **III. Possible explosive devices**

A letter or package containing a possible explosive device presents an immediate danger to anyone in its vicinity, and great care should be taken to handle such a situation safely. If you suspect the presence of such a device, ***clear the area immediately***, then **notify authorities by calling 911**.

#### **A. Recognizing a possible explosive device:**

A letter or package containing a possible explosive device may exhibit some of the following tell-tale signs:

- Excessive, inadequate or missing postage;
- Handwritten or poorly typed addresses;
- Incorrect titles or no name;
- Misspelling of common words;
- Oily stains, discoloration or odor;

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- No return address;
- Excessive weight;
- Lopsided or uneven envelope;
- Protruding wire or aluminum foil;
- Excessive security material such as masking tape, string etc;
- Visual distractions;
- Ticking sound;
- Restrictive markings such as “Personal”, “Confidential” or “To Be Opened By”;
- Postmark city/province/state does not match the return address;
- Foreign mail from politically unstable or hostile countries;
- Unprofessional wrapping;
- Threatening markings on exterior of package;
- Inappropriate air mail or special delivery stickers.

### **B. What to do/What not to do**

- Do not handle, disassemble or try to disarm any device you think may be a bomb;
- Alert your supervisor and/or your security officer to the presence of the device, then clear the area;
- ***Call 911 and request assistance. DO NOT CALL FROM CELLULAR PHONES!***

### **III. Possible biological or chemical hazard**

A letter or package containing a possible biological or chemical hazard presents an immediate danger to anyone in its vicinity, and great care should be taken to handle such a situation safely. If you suspect the presence of such a device, ***clear the area immediately***, then notify authorities by calling 911. Persons who handled or were in the vicinity of such a package should however remain accessible to responding authorities in case medical attention is required.

#### **A. Recognizing a possible biological or chemical hazard:**

Many of the same characteristics outlined above for suspicious letters and packages apply to potential biological and chemical hazards. Envelopes and packages arriving from unrecognized senders; or which exhibit suspicious markings, misspellings, stains, odors or uneven weight distribution could contain dangerous materials.

#### **B. What to do/What not to do**

- Do not handle or open any mail that appears suspicious;
- If the package has already been opened, do not touch, taste or smell any substance found;
- Gently back away and leave the package/letter in place and leave the area;
- Close the door to the immediate area;
- Turn off all heating, air conditioning, fan and ventilation systems;

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- Minimize physical contact with others;
- As soon as possible wash your hands with soap and water;
- Remove contaminated articles of clothing and place in a sealed container (e.g., plastic bag) to be forwarded to emergency responders;
- Shower (with soap and warm water) as soon as possible;
- List all people who may have been in contact or close proximity to the suspicious package/device and provide this list to the First Responders;
- If necessary, seek medical assistance as soon as possible.

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