



## SUSPICIOUS MAIL PROCEDURE

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**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this procedure is to reduce the likelihood that staff or the public will be injured by toxic agents or explosives that may be delivered through the mail or other delivery system.

**DELIVERY ACCEPTANCE STANDARDS**

Sources that bring mail and parcels into the state system are:

- The United States Postal Service
- State and local government interagency mail delivery networks
- Private couriers including national (e.g. Federal Express and United Parcel Service) and local courier services)
- Individuals, including attorneys and litigants.

Delivery by an unknown agent or by a suspicious agent may be the first indication that an envelope or package contains toxic agents or explosives.

If a member of the court staff is unsure of the identity of the person who is delivering an envelope or package to the court or if the person who is delivering the envelope or package is acting suspicious, immediately notify court security personnel and ask them to:

1. Verify the credentials and identity of the delivery person; and
2. Take responsibility for scrutinizing the delivery person and envelope or package to confirm that neither one poses no risk to staff or the public.

If the courthouse is equipped with one, all letters or parcels shall be inspected by the x-ray machine. Court staff shall coordinate with court security personnel in order to facilitate this inspection.

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**IDENTIFYING SUSPICIOUS MAIL**

United States Postal Inspectors and the Federal Bureau of Investigation report that the following characteristics may indicate that an envelope or package may contain toxic agents or explosives and should be deemed suspicious:

- Is unexpected or from someone unfamiliar to the recipient.
- Is addressed to someone no longer with the organization or is otherwise outdated.
- Has no return address, or has one that can't be verified as legitimate.
- Is of unusual weight, given their size, or are lopsided or oddly shaped.
- Is marked with restrictive endorsements such as "Personal" or "Confidential."
- Has protruding wires, strange odors, or stains.
- Shows a city or state in the postmark that doesn't match the return address.
- Is Foreign Mail, Air Mail, or Special Delivery.
- Has excessive postage.
- Has a hand-written or poorly typed address.
- Includes incorrect titles.
- Includes titles but no names.
- Contains misspelled common words.
- Is a rigid envelope.
- Has excessive securing material such as masking tape, string, etc.
- Contains visual distractions.
- Is leaking unidentified powder.

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Mail handling employees must determine whether the mail they receive is “normal” or suspect.

#### **OTHER GUIDELINES TO CONSIDER**

Each court facility shall consider the following guidelines for handling mail. These guidelines could include the following:

- Limiting the number of areas where mail is opened.
- Opening mail addressed to high profile positions or programs in a designated mail screening area.
- Instituting additional screening procedures for mail that does not meet the “suspicious” criteria but raises some level of concern.
- Applying the same cautionary standards to interagency mail as used for federal mail.
- Establishing procedures to visually inspect letters before running through automatic opening machines.
- Providing all employees who open mail with immediate access to clear plastic wrap or clear plastic sheets, clear plastic zip-lock bags, non-latex gloves, and particulate masks. Use of masks and gloves is optional until a suspicious substance is identified.

#### **PROCEDURES FOR RECEIPT OR DISCOVERY OF A SUSPICIOUS LETTER OR PARCEL**

In the event an employee receives or discovers a suspicious parcel he/she shall do the following:

- Remain calm.
- Avoid handling or trying to open the package or envelope. Avoid shaking or trying to empty it.
- Avoid sniffing the package or tasting any substance associated with it.
- If it is a letter and is “not” leaking or losing contents – If possible, place it in clear plastic bag.

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- If it is leaking a powder or chemical - If possible, cover the container with clear plastic wrap or clear plastic sheet. Do not try to clean up the substance.
- Isolate the parcel or letter and leave the area. Close the door or section off the area to prevent others from entering.
- Wash hands immediately with soap and water to prevent the spread of contamination.
- Contact your court security officer.

The court security officer will:

Evacuate the immediate area.

- If substance is leaking from the parcel or letter, inform the maintenance staff to turn off any HVAC system to avoid further contamination.
- Call the local police and report that you've received a parcel in the mail that may contain suspicious substances.
- Ensure that everyone who had contact with the piece of mail washes their hands with soap and water.
- List all the people who were in the room (or area) when the suspicious letter or package was recognized. Give the list to law enforcement officials for follow-up investigations and advice.

If substance has leaked from the letter or parcel the employee should:

- Remove contaminated clothing as soon as possible. Be prepared to place all items in plastic bags and present them to law enforcement agents if requested.
- Shower with soap and water as soon as possible. Do not use bleach or disinfectant on your skin.

**If smoke, fire, 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, EVACUATE THE BUILDING AND CALL 911.**

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**REPORTING**

The clerk of court or court security personnel must immediately notify the Security Manager upon the discovery of a suspicious envelope or package. The clerk of court or court security personnel must submit a written report to the Administrative Office of the Courts within seven (7) working days of the incident, utilizing the Judicial Branch Court Security Incident Reporting Form, summarizing the incident and listing actions taken as a result of the incident.

**REVISIONS**

Document Revision	Description of Change	Approval	Effective Date
1	Initial Release	AOC DIRECTOR	5/1/2013

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