

For discussion on
30 November 2001

LC Paper No. CB(2)490/01-02(03)

**Joint meeting of the Panels on Administration of Justice
and Legal Services, Financial Affairs and Security**

**Postal Items suspected to contain anthrax:
reported cases and handling procedures**

Reported cases

The statistics on suspicious RBC (including anthrax) cases during the period from 11 September to 18 November 2001 are as follows:

Total No. of reported cases	75
Total No. of reported cases actually involving anthrax	0
Cases involving postal items	55

Final Classification (Causes)

● Misunderstanding (involving postal items)	61(46)
● Malicious Reports	3
● Pending classification by Police (involving postal items)	11(9)

Handling procedures

2. The procedures to handle postal items suspected to contain anthrax are contained in the guidelines issued by the Security Bureau. These guidelines were first issued on 16 October 2001 to all postal workers of the Post Office. On 19 October similar guidelines were issued to all government departments. On 20 October 2001, the same guidelines were put on the Security Bureau website for reference by the public. A copy of the guidelines is attached for reference.

Security Bureau
November 2001

HOW TO HANDLE POSTAL ITEMS SUSPECTED TO CONTAIN ANTHRAX

1. Please note the following guidelines on the procedures for handling such incidents.

2. DO NOT PANIC

2.1 Anthrax organisms 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. It is advisable to cover open wounds with plaster. Disease can be prevented after exposure to the anthrax spores by early treatment by medical practitioner with the appropriate antibiotics. Anthrax is not spread from one person to another person.

2.2 For anthrax to be effective as a covert agent, it must be aerosolized into very small particles. This is difficult to do, and requires a great deal of technical skill and special equipment. If these small particles are inhaled, prompt recognition and treatment are effective.

2.3 It is difficult to identify suspicious mail item which may contain Anthrax going through the post, you will have to use common knowledge to judge or alert the supervisor.

3. SUSPICIOUS UNOPENED LETTER OR PACKAGE MARKED WITH THREATENING MESSAGE SUCH AS “ANTHRAX”:

3.1 Do not shake or empty the contents of any suspicious envelope or package.

3.2 PLACE the envelope or package in a plastic bag or some other type of container to help prevent leakage of contents.

3.3 If you do not have any container, then COVER the envelope or package with anything (e.g., clothing, paper, trash can, etc.) and do not remove this cover.

3.4 Then LEAVE the room and CLOSE the door, or section off the area to prevent others from entering (i.e., keep others away).

3.5 WASH your hands with **soap and hot water** to prevent spreading any powder to your face.

3.6 Report the incident immediately to your supervisor, who will notify the police.

3.7 Turn off all the fans and air conditioning in the area.

3.8 Supervisors should list all people who were in the room or area when this suspicious letter or package was recognized. This list will be given to the Police for follow-up investigations and advice.

4. ENVELOPE WITH POWDER AND POWDER SPILLS OUT ONTO SURFACE:

- 4.1 DO NOT try to CLEAN UP the powder. Take care NOT to disperse the powder into the air. If possible, COVER the spilled contents with a wet towel.
- 4.2 Turn off all the fans and air conditioning in the area.
- 4.3 Then LEAVE the room and CLOSE the door, or section off the area to prevent others from entering (i.e., keep others away).
- 4.4 Report the incident immediately to your supervisor, who will notify the police.
- 4.5 Supervisor should list all people who were in the room or area within 15 ft when this suspicious letter or package was recognized. This list will be given to the Police for follow-up investigations and advice. These people should stay together at a safe place, preferably with washing facility and wait until the Police arrive. It is important that these people must not moving around the building to avoid any potential contamination.
- 4.6 WASH your hands with **soap and hot water** to prevent spreading any powder to your face.
- 4.7 If you suspect that some powder may have stick onto your clothing, take all your clothes off and put them in a plastic bag. SHOWER with **soap and hot water** as soon as possible. *Do Not Use Bleach Or Other Disinfectant On Your Skin.*
- 4.8 On police arrival the situation will be assessed. Should the powder be a credible possible biological agent (e.g. Anthrax) decontamination and follow up medical treatment will be arranged as necessary. Avoid eating or drinking while waiting for police arrival. Avoid touching your face. Do not panic. In the extremely unlikely event that the powder is genuine Anthrax, medical procedures are extremely effective if started within a few hours of exposure.