

Identifying Suspicious Mail

October 29, 2001

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Given the threats and attacks via the mail system in recent weeks, we are providing information to help people identify and handle suspicious mail.

What is the United States Postal Service doing to safeguard the mail?

The USPS is purchasing equipment to irradiate the mail, rendering anthrax spores and many other bioterrorism agents nonviable. It is also no longer using blowers to clean equipment and is vacuuming equipment instead. It is possible that blowing out the equipment led to the spread of anthrax at the postal centers. The USPS has instructed its postal facilities to use stronger antibacterial cleaners during routine maintenance and is encouraging employees to wash their hands every two hours.

See http://www.usps.com/news/2001/press/pr01_1023safe.htm for more information.

How is the mail screened before it arrives at my office?

All post offices are on a heightened state of alert for suspicious letters or packages. Consequently, each post office that handles your mail is scrutinizing letters and packages at each step of the mailing process. Typically before a letter arrives on campus it would pass through multiple process centers. For example, a letter mailed from a small town in Maine would first be scrutinized at the local PO before being sent on for processing in Portland, Maine. Then it goes on to Seattle or Tacoma, the local distribution post office in Tumwater, and finally to the Evergreen mailroom. All of the postal centers are on high alert for suspect mail. By the time you receive your letter, the odds of a problem are close to zero.

What is Mail Services doing to ensure that my mail is safe?

Mail Services employees are attending training sponsored by Washington State Department of Personnel on detecting letter bombs and biohazardous threats that might be encountered in a mailroom. Mail Services staff is also receiving training from a video produced by the USPS in response to the anthrax letters. Mail Services staff are examining mail more closely to isolate suspicious packages. We have procedures in place to respond to a suspicious package.

What type of letters or packages should I be concerned about?

The USPS recommends that you look for the following signs:

1. Unexpected mail or from someone unfamiliar to you
2. Mail addressed to someone no longer with your department (Bear in mind, given the turnover at the college, you may receive mail for colleagues who no longer work here.)
3. Mail with no return address

4. Mail postmarked with a different city than the return address (But remember that many cities send their mail to another nearby city to process and postmark it.)
5. Mail marked with restrictive instructions, such as Personal or Confidential
6. Envelopes or packages of unusual weight for their size or are lopsided or strangely shaped
7. Anything with protruding wires, strange odors or smells

Please keep in mind that these are merely caution signs and are not hard and fast rules. Use common sense.

What should I do if I receive a suspicious package?

Do not open or shake the package. Contact Police Services at extension 6140. Police Services will contact the appropriate agencies to respond to a suspicious package or will assist you in contacting the sender on the return address to confirm that the letter was sent to you.

If suspect material is released from a letter or package, evacuate the immediate area and contact Police Services. You should wash your hands with soap and water and change your clothes if possible. Make a list of everyone who was in the vicinity.

I've heard that anthrax symptoms are similar to the flu. How do I know if I have anthrax?

Many diseases have symptoms that mimic the flu. If you are concerned about symptoms you're experiencing, you should contact your health care provider. The Thurston County Department of Health is educating local health care providers, including our Student Health Center, on identifying and treating bioterrorist-related diseases. The Health Department is also working with the local health care providers to track clusters of communicable diseases.

I'm still worried. What else can I do?

These are very stressful times and many people are having difficulties adjusting to the changes in our sense of security. No threats or attacks have been made against Evergreen or the state of Washington. You're encouraged to talk to people close to you to help gain reassurance or to seek outside help. Human Resource Services can provide counseling information available at no cost to employees through Employee Assistance Services (extension 6361). The Counseling Center is available to provide counseling to students (extension 6800).

This is also a good time to practice a healthier lifestyle. Eat a well balanced diet, exercise, wash your hands several times a day, engage in spiritual practices that comfort you, and seek the comfort of friends and family. If nothing else, these will bring peace of mind and keep you healthier.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call Robyn Herring, Environmental Health and Safety Coordinator, at extension 6111.

For more information on bioterrorism, you can follow the links at:

www.evergreen.edu/user/facilities/workunits/environmental_health_safety/bioterrorism.htm

We will update this web page as more information becomes available.