

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SYSTEM

TIPS FOR HANDLING SUSPICIOUS LETTERS AND/OR PACKAGES

Unique characteristics which should be closely examined:

- Sender's address and postmark are from different locations;
- No return address;
- Letters feel rigid, are uneven, lopsided or have a bulky appearance;
- Letter's origin is questionable;
- Excessive amount of postage is used;
- Package is wrapped in paper which is oil stained;
- Contains restricted endorsement such as "personal", "private", or "to be opened only by";
- Personal mail not normally sent to office address;
- Name and title of addressee are inaccurate;
- Cut and paste lettering or crude, homemade labels are used for return address;
- Letter or package appears disassembled or re-glued;
- Handwriting appears distorted or foreign;
- Protruding wires, tinfoil or strings are observed;
- Pressure or resistance is noted when attempting to remove the contents;
- Outer container is shaped irregularly, asymmetrically, or has soft spots or bulges;
- Exterior wrapping exhibits signs of previous use, such as traces of glue, mailing labels, return addresses or tape;
- Several combinations of tape are used to secure the parcel;
- Unprofessionally wrapped parcel is endorsed "Fragile – Handle With Care or Rush – Do not Delay";
- Package makes a buzzing, ticking, sloshing or other suspicious sound.

Suggested Employee Actions for Handling Suspicious Packages and/or Letters

- Do not open suspicious packages/letters until contents and origin can be verified;
- Exercise extreme care in handling;
- Isolate package in an area away from employees and secure immediate area;
- Contact Campus Police Department at ext. 8232 and request assistance;
- If possible, open windows in immediate area to vent potentially explosive gases;
- If possible, restrict use of electronic gadgets such as remote control devices, etc.;
- Do not submerge the package/letter in water;
- Do not place package/letter in a confined space such as a desk drawer or filing cabinet;
- Above all, exercise **COMMON SENSE**.

BASIC INFORMATION ON ANTHRAX

The following information was extracted from a UT Austin document that was modified from a Bexar County Document. Additional information is available at [CDC](http://www.cdc.gov) under the heading “Anthrax” or at <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/ehs/bulletin/anthraxindex.html>

If you receive a letter or note threatening Anthrax contamination:

RELAX AND REMAIN CALM – Although any threatened use of biological agent must be treated as though it is real, experience has demonstrated that these are likely to be a HOAX. If the suspected biological agent is reported as Anthrax, be assured that it is NOT contagious, and that treatment is readily available if administered before the onset of symptoms.

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO:

1. If it is a letter that you have opened, set it down gently at the location where you first read it. Then move to an area that will minimize your exposure to others. Avoid contact with others when possible, and remain in the area. Public Safety and Health responders will come to you.
2. If it is a note that you happen to find, LEAVE IT ALONE.
3. Advise a coworker in the immediate area what has happened and ask them to call the Campus Police Department at ext. 8232.
4. If possible, have the buildings ventilation system shut down and turn off any fans in the area.
5. Do not allow others into the area. If anyone enters, they should stay until instructed to leave by Public Safety or Health responders.
6. Remain calm. Exposure does not mean that you will become sick. Public Health responders will provide specific information and instructions about the symptoms and effective treatment to prevent illness.

WHAT YOU SHOULD NOT DO:

1. Do not pass the letter or note to others to look at.
2. Do not disturb any contents in the letter or note. Handling the letter may only spread the substance inside and increase the chances of it getting into the air.
3. Do not ignore the threat. It must be treated as real until properly evaluated.

If you receive a threat by telephone:

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO:

1. Call the Campus Police Department at ext. 8232 immediately.
2. If possible, have the buildings ventilation system shut down.
3. Remain calm, similar threats have all proven false and this is likely to be a hoax as well.

WHAT YOU SHOULD NOT DO:

1. Do not ignore the threat. It must be treated as real until properly evaluated.
2. Do not argue with or antagonize the caller.
3. Listen carefully to the caller so you can recall the details later. Listen for background noises.

What you can expect from a response by Public Safety and Health Responders:

Health department will respond with the jurisdictional law enforcement and fire service. People will be asked to cooperate by waiting in the area until an appropriate evaluation of the incident is made. You will be given information as soon as it is available. There may be a decontamination (washing/rinsing) process performed on the persons exposed and or the area. There are several ways to accomplish decontamination and the method used will be based upon the conditions present at the scene. The scene will be photographed and the letter and any product taken into custody as evidence and to determine the nature of any product. Statements will be taken from those involved.

Even in the event of a substance being real Anthrax, infection is unlikely and treatment is extremely effective. Stay calm and proceed slowly with the above instructions. For more information you may contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/Agent/Anthrax/Anthrax.asp>

For additional information please contact the VP for Business Affairs at 882-8240.