

**MEMORANDUM  
OREGON STATE POLICE**

DATE: October 18, 2001

TO: Bureaus  
Region Commanders  
Division Directors  
All OSP Area Commands/Worksites  
Regional Dispatch Centers

FROM: Gregory M. Willeford, Major  
Office of Public Safety and Security

SUBJECT: **RESPONSE TO SUSPICIOUS MAIL, PARCELS,  
SUBSTANCES INVOLVING SUSPECTED BIO/CHEM  
THREAT**

Refer to: State Mail Handling protocols –DAS October 15, 2001

**Introduction**

The recent events involving anthrax as well as the heightened state of awareness among the public has precipitated a series of meetings for the purpose of providing useful guidelines and information to assist first responders in conducting a risk assessment involving unknown substances, suspicious items, mail or parcels that may be suspected of being a biological or chemical hazard.

The following information is provided following consultation with Oregon Emergency Management, Oregon Health Department, Department of Environmental Quality, Oregon Association of Chiefs of Police, Oregon State Sheriff's Association, Office of State Fire Marshall and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

When responding to a report of a suspicious letter/package or unknown substance, responders should use common sense and sound judgment in conducting an assessment and in determining if the event is a bio/chem/explosive incident or if it may be a naturally occurring situation or hoax. In making an assessment of the situation, responders should take appropriate safety measures. For example, utilizing rubber gloves and a particulate mask may substantially mitigate risk of exposure to anthrax organisms. These items may be found in the Exposure Control Kit located in agency vehicles and work sites.

First responders should conduct an investigation including interviews of those involved in conducting the initial assessment. If the event is such that it reasonably could be a situation involving a bio/chem substance, Oregon Emergency Response System (OERS) should be notified immediately for appropriate response. This contact will initiate a conversation between the first responder on scene and the agency(s) specifically trained to deal with the suspected agent. The secondary response may be a haz-mat team, DEQ, Oregon Health Division, the Oregon State Police Arson and Explosives Section, the FBI or a combination of agencies. OERS is a pointer system for this purpose, and the staff is well trained in determining the appropriate agency response.

**OERS may be contacted at 1-800-452-0311 (nationwide) or 503-378-6377 (in Salem)** This contact may be made directly, or in most cases, through a Regional Dispatch Center (RDC). Contact with OERS may be made around the clock.

The following information is provided to assist first responders in conducting the initial assessment. Many other factors will exist (too numerous to list) that may affect the decisions made by the first responder.

### **POSSIBLE CONSIDERATIONS WHEN MAKING AN INITIAL ASSESSMENT**

- Are there person(s) exhibiting symptoms indicative of an exposure of some type?

Is there smoke, fire, visible fumes, or strange odors emitting from an area or package, or are people exhibiting signs of illness including difficulty breathing?

Call OERS, secure the scene, evacuate the area and establish a perimeter.

- Is the unknown substance associated with a threat (letter, phone call etc.)? Such a situation is a basis for immediate contact with OERS and the FBI.
- Consider the target/recipient of the substance or object. It is extremely unlikely that a biological or chemical agent will be sent to a private individual unless they have specific ties to a government entity, the media, or other likely target. What makes the recipient believe the letter is a threat? Do they know the sending party? Can they check?
- If a letter has been sent UPS or other delivery service, check the routing number, and contact the delivering company. They can often ascertain if the package came from an established account and they should have a contact number for the sender.

- Consider a logical explanation for the powder or substance. Is there any loose sheet rock, fire extinguisher powder or coffee creamers in the vicinity? Do any of the nearby garbage cans have discarded containers that would explain the powder/substance?
- Is there a history of the institution, corporation, or person involved that adds to the probability of this being a terrorist action?
- Is there a known history of the sender (if identified)?
- First responders should conduct an investigation including interviews of those involved in conducting the initial assessment. If the event appears to reasonably be a situation involving a bio/chem substance, OERS should be notified immediately for appropriate response.

If the event is deemed to be a probable hoax, it should be formally investigated further, including collection of evidence, for possible federal or state prosecution. In the event that any substance is collected for removal, extreme care should be taken. And again, in the case of a suspected bio/chem agent, such removal should be coordinated through OERS with the appropriate secondary responder. In any case, articles or substances moved by a first responder should be triple-bagged in plastic (i.e.: zip-lock type bags). Storage of any such material should be coordinated through OERS.

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The following information is provided as general reference material for the first responder: In most cases, actions taken would be in concert with secondary responders.

### **Biological Concerns:**

- Biological agents may produce delayed reactions.
- Unlike chemical agent exposure, biological agents do not usually require immediate removal of victims clothing or gross decontamination in the street. Inhalation is the primary route of concern.
- SCBA and structural firefighting clothing provides adequate protection for first responders.

## **Safety and Mitigation**

### **Wet/Dry unknown agent**

- Avoid contact with piles, puddles, wet surfaces, etc.
- Keep all potentially exposed individuals in close proximity, but out of the high-hazard area.
- Isolate area of building.

- Shut down HVAC (heating, ventilation/air conditioning) system that services the area

**Dry agent placed into HVAC system**

- Avoid contact with piles, puddles, wet surfaces, etc.
- Investigate all HVAC intakes, returns, etc., for evidence of agent or dispersal equipment.
- Isolate the building
- Remove all individuals from the building.
- Exposed victims may shower and change at their discretion.
- Shut down HVAC system that services the building.
- Do not enter building.

**Chemical Concerns:**

The following is the Safety and Mitigation info for the chemical agents.

- Call OERS to request HAZMAT Team.
  - Evacuate Building.
  - Isolate exposed individuals.
  - Try not to physically contact victims.
  - If possible, shut down air handlers to building.
  - Do not enter the building.
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