

<b>SUBJECT:</b> RESPONDING TO A PACKAGE WITH SUSPICION OF A BIOLOGICAL THREAT	<b>SECTION:</b> 303.12
<b>REVISED:</b> FEBRUARY 13, 2004	<b>PAGE(S):</b> 7

## PURPOSE

---

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide a model procedure for first-arriving emergency service personnel for addressing potential bioterror events primarily involving suspicious letters, packages or containers. While some information may reach beyond the typical scope of the first responder, it is outlined so that a first responder will have knowledge of the broader process in which they may be requested or required to assist.

## REFERENCES

---

*Model Procedures for Responding to a Package with Suspicion of a Biological Threat*, International Association of Fire Chiefs (January, 2004).

## DEFINITIONS

---

**Biological threat:** Any biological material capable of causing: death, disease, or other biological malfunction in a human, an animal, a plant, or another living organism; deterioration of food, water, equipment, supplies or material of any kind; or harmful alteration of the environment. Also, an expression of intention to use any such material for such purposes.

**First responder:** An emergency worker who responds to an incident within a set amount of time. The term is usually specific to fire, law enforcement and EMS' immediately arriving assets. Those arriving on scene at later intervals may be called a responder, an emergency responder, a secondary responder, a subject matter expert or a special law enforcement assignment.

**Hazmat responder:** A trained and certified individual who is a member of a hazardous material response team and qualified to respond to incidents involving toxic industrial chemical, chemical warfare agents and other weapons of mass destruction.

**Package:** A letter, box, jar, suitcase or any other container that may hold a suspect material.

**Weapons of mass destruction (WMD):** WMDs may be any nuclear, biological, incendiary, chemical, explosive or radiological weapon that may be used for death or destruction. For the purpose of this guideline, we will be referring to only biological agents.

## **POLICY: Identifying and Assessing Biological Threats**

---

- A. Personnel safety is the number-one priority in handling any suspected bioterror event.
- B. **Emergency Service Personnel must:**
1. Perform a scene survey (size-up) that includes a risk assessment of the threat for an improvised explosive device (IED) prior to approaching any suspicious package. If an explosive threat exists, or an explosion has occurred, evaluate the scene for a secondary IED. If an explosive threat exists, it will take precedence over any biological threat until rendered safe.
  2. **Not touch, move or open any suspicious package until a risk assessment on the package can be performed in coordination with hazmat personnel and law enforcement!**
  3. Notify appropriate law enforcement (Reading PD, FBI, postal inspectors) when a potential threat is identified.
  4. Don protective gloves (surgical, vinyl, etc.) as the minimum level of protective clothing for incidents involving suspicious packages.
  5. Use SCBA (or approved NIOSH respiratory protection) when the risk assessment indicates a respiratory threat. Many biological agents pose a significant health risk by inhalation.
  6. Only certified hazardous material technicians will participate in the handling of unknown or suspicious packages.
  7. Ensure that materials are safely packaged. Try to retain enough suspicious material for:
    - a. Laboratory analysis, if necessary;
    - b. Use as criminal evidence, regardless of whether the threat is ultimately determined to be infectious, toxic or a criminal hoax.
  8. Transfer custody of evidence to a law enforcement officer as soon as possible. Maintain chain of custody by obtaining a record of names and signatures every time custody of a suspicious material or sample for laboratory analysis changes hands. The Hamilton County Health District shall be consulted regarding the handling/transport of samples.
  9. Complete an incident report with the initial law enforcement agency, which will be forwarded to the local FBI WMD coordinator.

## **RESPONDER PROCEDURE: Assessment**

---

- A. Assess the hazard by:
1. gathering information from the reporting party, bystanders, witnesses and any other first responders.
  2. determine who has physically had contact with the package.
  3. conducting an initial evaluation of the package; consider using binoculars while standing a safe distance away from the suspicious package.

- B. Determine the answers to the following questions:
1. Was the package accompanied by a verbal or written threat?  
(see Appendix A on threat considerations)
  2. Is the package open, leaking, giving off an odor or have any suspicious markings?
  3. If the package is open, was any substance released from the package?
  4. Is anyone who came into contact with the package feeling ill?
  5. Is the package making noise?
  6. Are there any wires protruding?
3. When possible, the final hazard determination should be a coordinated effort with a hazardous material response team and a bomb squad.

**If the answer to all assessment questions is “NO”:**

1. If they are not already on the scene, law enforcement should be contacted and appraised of the incident, and a collective determination on the removal or disposal of the package should be agreed upon.
2. The package should be placed in a sealable plastic bag and double-bagged.
3. Anyone who touched the package should thoroughly wash hands or affected area with soap and water. A package that is not hazardous may still be unsanitary.
4. Consult with Health District and be prepared to face media coverage.

**If the answer to any assessment question is “YES”:**

1. If they are not already on the scene, notify local law enforcement. Establish a unified command with the lead emergency service agencies. Ensure all special called agencies are included in the unified command structure.
2. Request special assistance (e.g. Cincinnati Bomb Unit, Greater Cincinnati HazMat, Cincinnati CBRNE, Health District, state/federal authorities, etc.) as soon as a threat requiring their involvement is identified.
3. Control the scene.
  - a. **Establish hot, warm and cold zones.** The size of the hazard control zones should be based on the assessed threat. Depending on the scenario, the initial hot zone may range from the desk top in an office to an entire building depending on the situation. Use barrier tape to cordon off open areas.
  - b. **Shut down the building ventilation system if there has been a substance release.**
  - c. **Turn off high-speed mail processing equipment** that may have handled the suspicious package.
  - d. **Isolate those who have been exposed or potentially exposed and consider shelter-in-place as an initial tactical consideration. Do not evacuate the building unless as immediate threat is evident.** Individuals, including emergency service personnel, who contacted the

package must be assessed for the need for decontamination (see decon guidelines – level of decontamination may vary from washing with soap and water, to full gross decon) and transport for evaluation. Only under extreme medical emergency conditions should a contaminated victim be transported prior to decontamination and then should only be transported after being placed in a protective envelope (e.g. Tyvek® suit) to minimize secondary contamination of the general population and/or environment.

- e. **Consider location and well-being of those unexposed or unlikely exposed.** Non-victims may need to be gathered together for law enforcement interviews, or to receive information from the Health District or other officials to inform and allay fears.
4. Consider/request the assistance of Greater Cincinnati HazMat to assist with screening for hazard assessment, sample collection, decontamination and other mitigation activities.
5. Appropriate local law enforcement should notify FBI WMD coordinator.
6. As needed, conduct a threat assessment via the FBI WMD coordinator, with the FBI Counter-Terrorism Division's WMD Operations Unit, the FBI Laboratory Division, and other appropriate federal agencies. Coordinate with any designated regional threat assessment center.
7. Contact the Hamilton County General Health District (who should in turn notify state authorities and the CDC) if casualties are involved or a threat of public health exposure or environmental contamination exists.
8. In coordination with law enforcement, notify the US Postal Inspection Service, whenever it appears that the threat was delivered through the US Postal Service. Assist with ensuring that origin and tracking information is obtained from the package (ideally, photographs of the front and back).
9. Treat the scene as a crime scene. Preserve evidence in coordination with law enforcement (local/state/federal). Assist in identifying and collecting biological evidence.
10. Coordinate transport of public health samples with law enforcement.
11. Be prepared to perform basic field screening of the biological sample to rule out radiation, flammability, corrosives, and volatile organic compounds to gain acceptance into the appropriate laboratory.
12. Identify and list names of anyone who may have been exposed to the suspicious substance so they may be contacted once results of the substance are available or if there is other additional information requiring dissemination.
13. In coordination with law enforcement (local/state/federal), identify a single point-of-contact for follow-up.
14. Prepare to intelligently relate to the media.

## **RESPONDER PROCEDURE: Decontamination Guidelines**

---

### **A. Unopened, no leak or exposure**

1. Thoroughly wash hands or affected area with soap and water.
2. General Health District may be notified for further assistance.

### **B. Unopened, oily or granular leak, no exposure**

1. Thoroughly wash hands or affected area with soap and water.
2. Shower at home with soap and water.
3. Launder clothes separately in hot water with soap.\*
4. General Health District may be notified for further assistance.

**C. Opened, no exposure**

1. Thoroughly wash hands or affected area with soap and water.
2. General Health District must be notified.

**D. Opened, oily or granular substance present, with exposure to:**

**1. Hands only (minimal contact)**

- a) Thoroughly wash hands or affected area with soap and water.
- b) Change and place clothes in a sealed plastic bag.
- c) Shower at home with soap and water, shampoo hair.
- d) Launder clothes separately in hot water with soap.\*
- e) General Health District must be notified.

**2. Hands and clothes**

- a) Remove clothes and seal in plastic bag onsite.
- b) Gross decontamination by emergency service that is based on and justified by the hazard assessment.
- c) Transport for evaluation, after decontamination.
- d) Leave contaminated clothing onsite for later pick-up by the Health District or other determined agency, as appropriate.

\*As an extra layer of precaution, consult with Health District about refraining from washing any clothing, keeping them bagged until any investigation or lab tests are completed.

## APPENDIX A: Identifying Suspicious Packages

---

Suspicious packages should be risk assessed for articulated threats.

Examples would include:

- Actual threat message in or on the package
- Addressee in position of authority, e.g., government employee, political figure, private sector executive
- Addressee in controversial business, e.g., Planned Parenthood, chemical industry, forestry

**What kind of packages should be considered suspicious?**

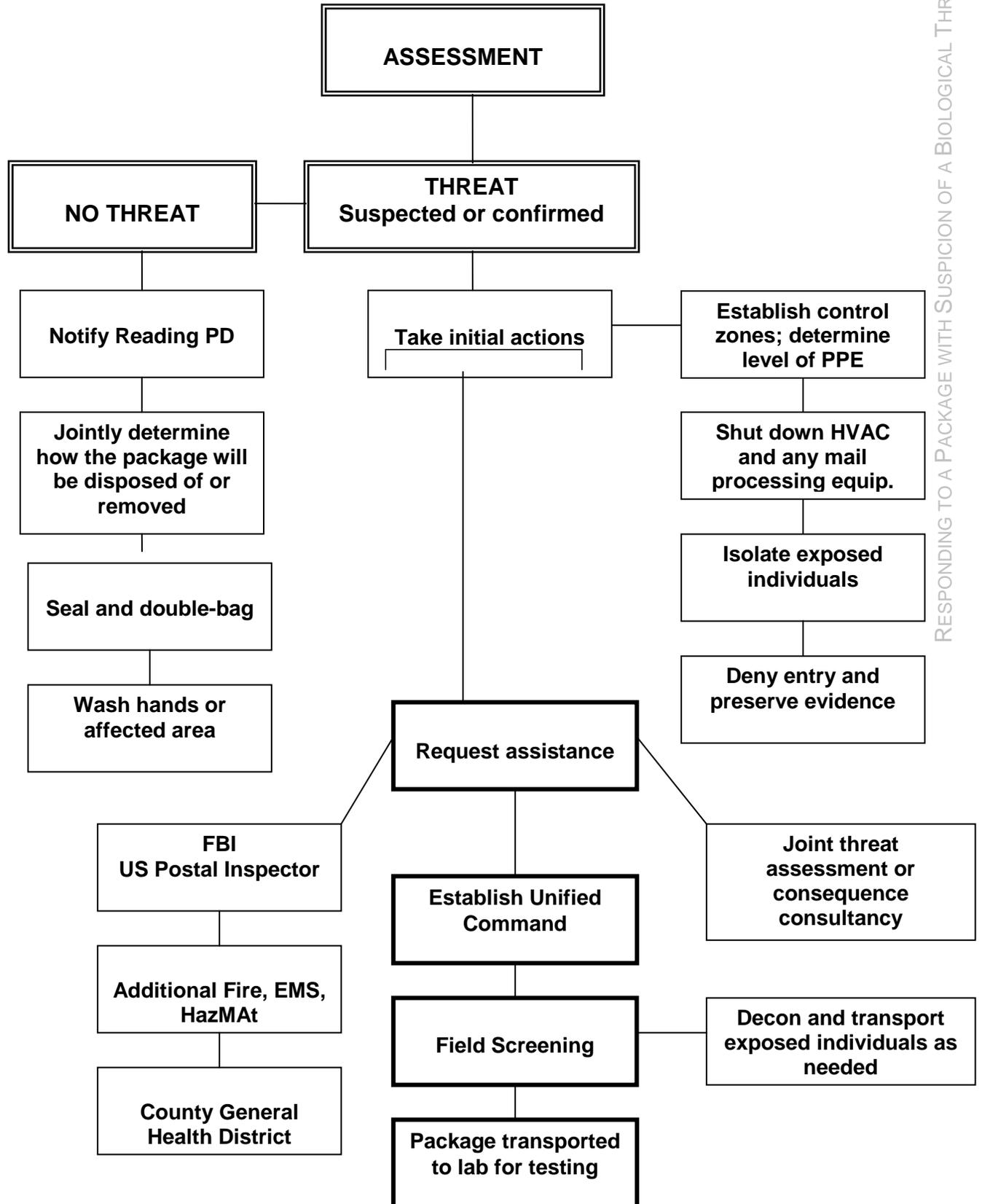
*Some characteristics of suspicious packages and envelopes include the following:*

- Inappropriate or unusual labeling
  - Excessive postage
  - Handwritten or poorly typed addresses
  - Misspellings of common words
  - Strange return address or no return address
  - Incorrect titles or title without a name
  - Not addressed to a specific person
  - Marked with restrictions, e.g., “Personal” or “Do not x-ray”
  - Marked with any threatening language
  - Postmarked from a city or state that does not match the return address
- Appearance
  - Powdery substance felt through or appearing on the package
  - Oily stains, discolorations or odor
  - Lopsided or uneven envelope
  - Excessive packaging material such as tape, string, etc.
- Other suspicious signs
  - Excessive weight
  - Ticking sound
  - Protruding wires or aluminum foil

If a package or envelope appears suspicious, **NON-EMERGENCY PERSONNEL SHOULD NOT OPEN OR TOUCH IT.** Emergency personnel should limit direct contact with the package. Only those with hazardous material technician training should proceed to handle the package when necessary.

Based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s FAQs regarding anthrax. [www.bt.cdc.gov](http://www.bt.cdc.gov)

**APPENDIX B: Decision Matrix**



RESPONDING TO A PACKAGE WITH SUSPICION OF A BIOLOGICAL THREAT