



Cambridge Police Department

Effective Date: December 26, 2001

NEW POLICY # 706
Policy and Procedures
Procedure 2001-10

PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING SUSPECTED ANTHRAX LETTERS AND PACKAGES AND OTHER BIOLOGICAL AGENT THREATS

I. Purpose

This Procedure will:

- A. Describe the nature of anthrax organisms;
- B. Explain actions to be taken when responding to calls for suspected anthrax;
- C. Further explain the patrol response when a package is opened and there is unusual substance discovered, or when the package has not been opened;
- D. Provide a protocol when a suspicious package is brought to the police station;
- E. Describe actions to take for possible exposure to biological agents and health issues.

II. Anthrax

Anthrax is an acute infectious disease caused by the bacteria bacillus anthracis. The disease occurs naturally in plant eating, warm-blooded animals such as cattle and sheep. The disease, which was very common in areas where livestock was raised, has all but been eliminated by the advent of animal immunization programs. The spores from the bacteria, which cause the infection, can infect humans in three ways, cutaneous, gastrointestinal and inhalation. Inhalational infection takes place when a human inhales a sufficient number of spores and they settle in the lungs. For the purposes of this protocol, the inhalation of the bacteria will be considered to be the main threat to human life. Anthrax is not a contagious disease that can be passed from human to human.

For anthrax to be effective, a human would have to inhale approximately 10,000 spores of the bacteria. Although this sounds like a large number, it is actually very small where spores are concerned. The spores have to be dry and suspended in the air at a level where individuals may inhale them. They must also be able to remain at that height so that great numbers of individuals can pass through and inhale the spores. To be delivered effectively, the spores must be aerosolized into very small particles. This is difficult to do. If these small particles are inhaled, life-threatening lung infections may occur, but prompt recognition and treatment are effective.

Symptoms of the disease vary depending on how the disease was contracted, but usually occur within 7 days after exposure. Initial symptoms of inhalation anthrax infection may resemble the flu. After several days, the symptoms may progress to severe breathing problems and shock. The intestinal disease form of anthrax may follow the consumption of contaminated food and is characterized by an acute inflammation of the intestinal tract. Initial signs of nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, and fever are followed by abdominal pain, vomiting of blood, and severe diarrhea. In persons exposed to anthrax, infection can be prevented with antibiotic treatment. Early antibiotic treatment of anthrax is essential – **delay lessens chances for survival**. Anthrax usually is susceptible to penicillin, doxycycline, and fluoroquinolones. An anthrax vaccine also can prevent infection. Vaccination against anthrax is not recommended for the general public to prevent disease and is not available at this time.

III. Responding to Calls for Suspected Anthrax And Other Biological Agent Threats

A. Responsibilities of ECC

1. Call takers receiving telephone reports of suspicious packages/mail must obtain the following information:
 - a. Has the mail/package been opened?
 - b. If mail/package has been opened, were there any unusual substances inside (i.e. white powdery/filmy substances)?
 - c. If such a substance is present, how many people have been exposed and are there any ill effects?
2. When a caller reports that he/she is concerned about the contents of a piece of mail or package being contaminated by a biological agent, the call will be assigned a “Level 0 Biohazard Investigation Incident.”
 - a. Notify the police and dispatch the call as a Level 0 Incident (This is the same response as an incident that requires that a car and a sector sergeant respond)
 - b. Notify the Shift Commander
3. Call takers should attempt to ascertain the characteristics of the suspicious package/mail.

Factors and Characteristics of Suspicious Packages May Include

- a. Excessive postage
- b. Incorrect titles
- c. Misspellings of common words
- d. No return address
- e. Lopsided or uneven envelope
- f. Visual distractions

- g. Excessive security material such as masking tape, string, etc.
- h. Marked with restrictive endorsements, such as, “Personal” or “Confidential.”
- i. Shows a city or state in the postmark that does not match the return address.
- j. Handwritten or poorly typed addresses
- k. Title, but no name.
- l. Oily stains, discoloration or odor.
- m. Excessive weight.
- n. Protruding wires or aluminum foil.
- o. Ticking sound.

B. Patrol Response Where Package Is Open and There is An Unusual Substance

1. A Patrol sergeant and a patrol unit, as well as a Cambridge Fire Deputy (or other person as designated by the Fire Chief), will respond to the scene and conduct a risk assessment. Officers should wait for fire personnel who have safety equipment before entering the area of possible contamination.
 - a. The risk assessment will be conducted by interviewing the complainant or others with knowledge, observation of the package if this is possible without risking exposure, and any other factors that may create a risk. (See list of Suspicious Characteristics listed in III-A-3 of this policy) The Cambridge Fire Department will supply the necessary officer(s) with any protective equipment that may be required to conduct this assessment.
2. The responders will determine if there is any suspicion of an explosive device.
3. If there is suspicion of an explosive device, the Cambridge Police Bomb Squad will be summoned.
4. If there is no suspicion that the package/mail is an explosive device, the police will establish and maintain an appropriate perimeter.
5. The Cambridge Fire Department will assume incident command of the scene. The Fire Department will make decisions/recommendations regarding the evacuation and/or ingress to building.
6. If the Fire Department or Health Department determines that a building/area should be evacuated, the police will assist to ensure safe and orderly evacuation. The Department of Public Health and local Boards of Health may exercise their authority to protect the public from infection pursuant to M.G.L. c. 111, §§ 99 and 104 by closing a building and posting notice of the infected place. Warrants may be sought to enforce this order if the circumstances require forceful evacuation pursuant to M.G.L. c. 111, §99 and no other criminal charge is applicable.

7. The responding patrol unit will complete an investigative report documenting the nature of the call and the actions taken. This report should include the names of the persons interviewed, the nature of the incident, a description of the suspicious item, including why the package was suspicious, any information on how the package arrived at its location, names and addresses of persons who may have been exposed to the substance, and the disposition. The investigative report should be classified as a Level O Biohazard Response and should include any other appropriate violations of law.
8. When the Fire Department takes command and sends a package to the State Laboratory and a crime has been committed, this File number and the nature of offense must be given to the Fire Department personnel for inclusion on the Laboratory Report.

C. Patrol Response Where Package Has Not Been Opened

1. A Patrol sergeant and a patrol unit, as well as a Cambridge Fire Deputy (or other person as designated by the Fire Chief) will respond to the scene and conduct a risk assessment.
 - a. The risk assessment will be conducted by interviewing the complainant or others with knowledge, observation of the package if this is possible without risking exposure, and any other factors that may create a risk. (See list of Suspicious Characteristics listed in III-A-3 of this policy)
2. The responders will determine if there is any suspicion of an explosive device.
3. If there is suspicion of an explosive device, the Cambridge Police Bomb Squad will be summoned.
4. If there is no suspicion that the package/mail is an explosive device, the police will establish and maintain an appropriate perimeter.
5. The Cambridge Fire Department will assume incident command.
6. The responding patrol unit will complete an investigative report documenting the nature of the call and the actions taken. This report should include the names of the persons interviewed, the nature of the incident, and the disposition. The investigative report should be classified as a Level O Biohazard Response in addition to any other appropriate violations of law.
7. When the Fire Department takes command and sends a package to the State Laboratory and a crime has been committed, this File number and the nature of offense must be given to the Fire Department personnel for inclusion on the Laboratory Report.

IV. Protocol When A Suspicious Package Is Brought To Police Station

- A. When a person brings a suspicious package or envelope to the police station, the item should be placed in a plastic bag (biohazard bags will be made available by the fire department) or some other type of container to prevent leakage of the contents.
- B. If there is no container or bag available, gently cover the item with non-permeable material (i.e. plastic, paper, trash) and do not remove this cover.
- C. The officer should notify the Shift Commander and ECC.
- D. The protocol described in **Section IIIB or IIIC** of this policy should then be applied, depending upon the nature of the package/envelope.

V. Protocol For Possible Exposure To Biological Agent – Health Issues

- A. The Cambridge Health Department will be notified by ECC when the Fire Department's HazMat Team is summoned to the scene.
- B. The Health Department will distribute health and bio-terrorism information which may include the following:
 - 1. Wash hands with soap and water to prevent spreading any powder/residue to face.
 - 2. Remove contaminated clothing as soon as possible and place in a plastic bag or other container that can be sealed.
 - 3. Shower with soap and water as soon as possible.
 - 4. Do not use bleach or harsh disinfectants on skin.
 - 5. Distribute Fact Sheets on Anthrax, Bio-terrorism, emotional reactions since September 11th, and proper mail handling procedures.
- C. If necessary, the Health Department will collect all relevant contact information for persons who have had possible exposure to the suspicious substance.
- D. In the event that the Cambridge Health Department decides, in consultation with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health State Lab, that the substance may be toxic, the Cambridge Health Department will contact potentially exposed people and initiate appropriate measures for treatment.