

CAYUGA COUNTY POLICY MANUAL
Section 37

Subject: Protocols for Handling Mail

Effective Date: 5/25/10; Res. 255-10

Supersedes Policy of: 10/16/01 by Legislative Chairperson

Policy Title: Procedure for Opening Mail and Packages

Because of nationwide concern over the potential of anthrax exposure from opening mail and packages, I am putting the following protocol in effect as of today until further notice. All department heads need to review this information with their employees today.

Protocols for Mail Handling:

Common sense and care should be used in inspecting and opening mail or packages.

- Examine unopened envelopes, for foreign bodies or powder.
- Do not open letters with your hands: use a letter opener, or, latex, which can be obtained through the Health and Human Services Department (253-1451)
- Open letters and packages with a minimum of movement to avoid spilling contents.
- Each organization should assess whether it is a possible target for criminal acts. Based on this assessment, you may wish to take additional precautions such as restricting the opening of mail to a limited number of trained individuals.

Training shall be provided by the department at the employee's orientation.

What Types of Letters May be Suspect:

- Any letter or package that has suspicious or threatening messages written on it
- Letters with oily stains
- Envelopes that are lopsided, rigid, bulky, discolored or have a strange order
- Envelopes with no return address
- Unexpected envelopes from foreign countries
- No postage or non-cancelled postage
- Improper spellings of common names, places or titles

FOR SUSPECT ENVELOPES:

- DO NOT OPEN ENVELOPE OR PACKAGE
- LEAVE it and EVACUTAE the room
- KEEP others from entering
- NOTIFY your immediate supervisor, who will IMMEDIATELY contact 911. They will instruct your supervisor as to what will happen next.

FOR PACKAGES THAT ARE OPENED AND WHICH CONTAIN SUSPICIOUS MATERIAL DO NOT PANIC:

- Anthrax organisms can cause skin infection, gastrointestinal infection or pulmonary infection. To do so, the organism must be rubbed into abraded skin, swallowed or inhaled as fine, aerosolized mist. It does not leap into one's body. All forms of disease are generally treatable with antibiotics.
- Anthrax cannot be easily aerosolized out of an envelope or package containing powder. The same facts and conditions are generally true for other bacteria likely to be considered as biological weapons.

CONTAIN THE EXPOSURE:

- Close off the room (doors and windows), and do not allow anyone other than qualified emergency personnel to enter.
- If possible, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water
- If clothing is heavily contaminated, don't brush vigorously
- Make a list of all people who had actual contact with the powder for investigating Authorities and your supervisor

NOTIFY APPROPRIATE AUTHORITIES:

Immediately contact Cayuga County 911

While the possibility of an incident like those that occurred in Florida and Manhattan is low, it is highly recommended that all county employees follow these protocols for handling suspicious mail.

Our county has a well-defined plan of action in place for handling this type of situation and we are constantly updating and renewing it. Our Emergency Management Office, with the assistance of the county agencies that have roles in dealing with these types of situations has had the plan in place since 1988 in preparation for any possibilities that might have occurred as a result of the Millennium celebration. We are as prepared here as we can be right now, but we are also flexible in terms of adjusting our plan to meet any developing situations.

Note: Policy shall be reviewed periodically by the County Administrator or his/her designee. Any revisions approved by the Legislature shall be distributed to departments.