

# DRAFT UPDATE TO MINNESOTA COURT SECURITY MANUAL *MAIL SCREENING*

Depending upon the available resources, a mail screening program should be implemented for courthouses. Due consideration should be given to having a central receiving mail station where agencies would pick up their mail. The main advantage to this is the person assigned to mail station duties would be thoroughly trained in all aspects in reference to suspicious packages and letters; the result being you now would have established a pre-screening program which directly supports the assessments as conducted by individual agencies and employees.

## **SCREENING THE MAIL FOR WEAPONS AND EXPLOSIVES**

It is a current assumption that in a majority of Minnesota courthouses fluoroscopes (*x-ray machines*) are not readily available to screen courthouse mail and deliveries. That being the case, it is recommended that courthouse personnel be trained in *Letter and Parcel Bomb Recognition Points* and *General Responses to Suspicious Letter and Packages*. These areas are covered in detail under **Chapter 8: Bomb Threat Response Plan**. Employees would then be empowered to conduct the initial or preliminary assessment of mail and deliveries.

**The specific section of the Courthouse Bomb Threat Response Plan that addresses those agencies and persons to be contacted to further investigate a suspicious package or letter needs to be disseminated to all courthouse employees**

**Assessing the contents of a suspicious package with a fluoroscope requires that each x-ray image be evaluated and classified in one of four categories:**

- **No Threat** - Defined as no identifying monitor image (*shape, density, and/or color*) that could be part of a weapon or improvised explosive device.
- **Contraband Item** - Defined as a suspicious or confirmed monitor image (*shape, density, and/or color*) indicating an item as been pre-identified as contraband.
- **Possible Threat** - Defined as a suspicious monitor image (*shape, density, and/or color*) that indicates a likelihood of weapons or an improvised explosive device.
- **Obvious Threat** - Defined as a confirmed monitor image (*shape, density, and/or color*) that indicates the presence of weapons or an improvised explosive device.

Shipped items that cannot be screened through a fluoroscope should require an agency contact to verify the shipping contents before the item will be allowed into the courthouse. Items that either meet threat profiles or are still deemed suspicious (*per mail bomb indicators*) may require the Sheriff and/or Police Department to implement the courthouse bomb-threat response plan.

## **SCREENING THE MAIL FOR ANTHRAX**

Letters containing anthrax have been received by mail in several areas in the United States. In some instances, anthrax exposures have occurred, with several persons becoming infected. To prevent such exposures and subsequent infection, all persons should learn how to recognize a suspicious package or envelope and take appropriate steps to protect themselves and others.

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, such as “Personal,” “Confidential,” 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 or envelope
  - Oily stains, discolorations, or odor
  - Lopsided or uneven envelope
  - Excessive packaging material such as masking tape, string, etc.
- Other suspicious signs
  - Excessive weight
  - Ticking sound
  - Protruding wires or aluminum foil

**If a package or envelope appears suspicious, DO NOT OPEN IT.**

Suggestions for handling suspicious packages or envelopes:

- Do not shake or empty the contents of any suspicious package or envelope.
- Do not carry the package or envelope, show it to others or allow others to examine it.
- Put the package or envelope down on a stable surface; do not sniff, touch, taste, or look closely at it or at any contents which may have spilled.
- Alert others in the area about the suspicious package or envelope. Leave the area, close any doors, and take actions to prevent others from entering the area. If possible, shut off the ventilation system.
- WASH hands with soap and water to prevent spreading potentially infectious material to face or skin. Seek additional instructions for exposed or potentially exposed persons.
- If at work, notify a supervisor, a security officer, or a law enforcement official. If at home, contact the local law enforcement agency.
- If possible, create a list of persons who were in the room or area when this suspicious letter or package was recognized and a list of persons who also may have handled this package or letter. Give this list to both the local public health authorities and law enforcement officials

**If you have comments on this draft of the Courthouse Security Manual, please contact Bridget Johnson at 651-284-0248 or [bridget.johnson@courts.state.mn.us](mailto:bridget.johnson@courts.state.mn.us). Thank you.**