

Mandatory stand-up talk

April 7, 2006

Notification procedures for suspicious mail and unknown powders or substances.

Information about notification procedures is very important to have in the event that suspicious mail, unknown powders or other suspect substances are discovered in the workplace.

Remember the basics! Don't handle. Isolate. Clear the area of people.

The first notification required of the supervisor or manager of the unit where an incident occurs is to call the Postal Inspection Service. The Inspection Service maintains 24 hr/7 day-a-week phone numbers, which are listed on the Response Checklist and which should always be available in every work unit.

If a delay occurs in the Inspection Service response, contact local first responders. Remember, though, every effort must be made to have a Postal Inspector assess the situation.

Also, contact the Manager of Emergency Preparedness for your District so that he or she can enter an alert into the Postal Emergency Management System (PEMS). PEMS will automatically notify a postal emergency management team (EMT) for your plant and/or District, in the event that you need additional support to manage the incident.

The phone number for the Manager of Emergency Preparedness also should be noted and kept in the Response Checklist. Contact your District office if you need this information.

There is one exception to this notification procedure.

In any emergency situation involving fire, smoke, fumes or employees exhibiting medical symptoms, you should evacuate immediately and call your local emergency responders. When all persons are safely away from the area, the supervisor or manager must call the Inspection Service, and then the manager of Emergency Preparedness for your District.

Threat assessment

The Postal Inspection Service is committed to protecting our people, the mail and our facilities. Postal Inspectors have been trained to respond to incidents involving suspicious mail and unknown powders or substances.

In addition to assessing the characteristics of the mailpiece and substance, the Inspectors perform a battery of screening tests to rule out a credible threat. If at any time during the process they detect a hazard, they retreat and call for outside first responders.

If necessary, samples are transported to the appropriate government laboratory for further analysis. Since this screening program began, Postal Inspectors have responded to numerous situations and have performed tests on all types of substances.

When you contact the Inspection Service, it is important that you be prepared to provide all information you have concerning the characteristics of the mailpiece, such as address information, class of mail and markings from notes or mental recollection. Again, do not handle or disturb the mailpiece or substance once you suspect that it may be questionable or harmful.

People are our first concern

In the rare case that an evacuation is required, such as decontamination or medical follow-up, the Postal Service will coordinate with local, state and federal health and emergency organizations. .

Remember, you are the first line of defense. Although dangerous events have been few in light of the hundreds of millions of mail pieces we handle daily, not knowing what to do can cause unnecessary confusion and alarm. Be familiar with the immediate response actions for suspicious mail and unknown powders or substances and keep the checklist readily available in your work unit. Follow these procedures and encourage your co-workers to follow them as well.

For more information, visit the USPS intranet Blue home page and look for the link for Suspicious Mail under "Hot Topics."