



# United States Postal Inspection Service



Ohio – Kentucky – Indiana  
Greater Cincinnati

## Security Plan for Suspected Letter and Parcel Bombs

Your organization should assess vulnerability to classic acts of terrorism such as extortion, kidnapping and the holding hostage of key management personnel, as well as other forms of terrorist coercive bargaining. Your organization should be particularly mindful if it maintains a staff and/or facilities outside the United States. If such vulnerability exists, a protective security review should be made. This security review should be heavily slanted toward providing protection against "classic" tactics, whether employed by foreign-oriented extremists or domestic "hate" groups. Consultations with experts knowledgeable in terrorist tactics and a target probability evaluation procedure are highly recommended. Since all organizations receive mail, a letter and parcel bomb security plan is an essential component of this process.

### Preparation of the postal bomb security plan

In preparing the Postal Bomb Security Plan, it is generally more advantageous to formulate it as an annex to the basic bomb security plan already in existence, if any. The annex can then detail the specifics required for implementation and operation of the plan without requiring changes in the basic plan or creating undue confusion. Only those concerned with the mail center operation are directly affected.

The following material is intended to provide guidelines for establishing mail center procedures used against postal bombs and will provide the security officer or management official with the necessary basic information enabling that individual to draft a bomb threat plan.

### **Key points to be developed**

- Perform target probability evaluation procedure to determine if your organization is a potential terrorist target.
- Appointment of a Mail Center Postal Bomb Security Plan Coordinator and an alternate to assign responsibility for and ensure compliance with the developed plan.
- Establish direct lines of notification and communication among the mail center coordinator, management and security officer.
- Develop specific screening and inspection procedures for all incoming mail or package deliveries.
- Develop specific mail center handling techniques and procedures for postal items identified through screening as suspect.
- Develop verification procedures for identifying suspect postal items encountered through the screening process.
- Designate and/or construct an isolation area for use with suspect postal items encountered through the screening process. Establish a safety zone around the isolation area.
- Construct a holding/carrying container for suspect postal items.
- Conduct training session(s) for mail center security and management personnel to ensure complete understanding and practicality of all phases of the developed Postal Bomb Security Plan.

### **Target probability evaluation procedure**

The security officer and top management personnel should meet to evaluate the probability of your organization or members of your organization becoming

targets for acts of terrorism. The following are typical questions asked during assessment of target probability:

- Does the organization provide products, materials, technical assistance, technical training, or operate plants or facilities within the country involved or connected with current terrorist activity?
- Has the organization or key personnel within the organization contributed money to, provided support for, or been politically affiliated with any charity, aid program, cultural exchange, or educational program for which public recognition has been received which could in any way be construed as affiliated with current terrorist targets?
- Does the organization support political or social causes that would make it a likely target for radical domestic "hate" groups?
- Has the organization refused to do business with, withdrawn from, or failed to successfully negotiate business contracts with companies, organizations, or governments within the last two years that are affiliated with current terrorists?
- Has the organization, since World War II, manufactured or produced weapons of war or military support items (radios, vehicles, uniforms) for international arms trade which would normally bear tags or markings identifying the organization as to the manufacturer?
- Has any member of management made public statements, been quoted, interviewed, or authored papers on any facet of current terrorist activity or topics?

### **Appointment of the mail center postal bomb plan coordinator**

In selecting and appointing the Mail center Postal Bomb Plan Coordinator and an alternate, management should ensure those persons selected are mature, responsible and emotionally stable. Where possible, this selection should be

made from those persons already involved in the overall bomb threat program and who have already received training under that plan.

The function of the mail center coordinator (or his/her alternate) is to assume command of the situation when a suspect postal item is encountered in the screening process. The coordinator is initially responsible for seeing that personnel who have detected the suspect postal item place sufficient safety distance between themselves and the item and that employees, in general, do not cluster around the item out of curiosity. The coordinator will then notify management directly and provide them with specific details of the suspect item and carry out the remaining steps of the plan under the direction of management and security.

### **Direct lines of communication to management & security officer**

Direct channels of communication between the mail center coordinator and management and security is vital. Security must receive prompt notification when a suspect postal item is encountered so notification may be given to the supporting police bomb squad and management in order that the controlled and responsible actions/decisions concerning the suspect postal item may be initiated.

### **Screening procedures for postal items**

Incoming mail in any organization follows much the same pattern. Bags or bundles of mail, as well as parcels, are delivered to a centralized mail center for distribution. (If this centralized receiving procedure is not currently in operation, steps should be taken to institute such a program.) The actual initial sorting of the mail for delivery to units, divisions, or individuals must be done by hand, with each item being picked up, its address read, and the mail item placed into its proper distribution box for delivery. This is the point where screening of incoming

mail for suspect items should occur and those individuals who normally handle this mail sorting function should perform the screening action. This is critical because those individuals are most likely to notice postal items that are contrary to normal mail (recognition points).

Considering past patterns of postal bomb construction, packaging, mailing, and addressing, the screening of incoming mail should involve the search for those items of mail that have one or more of the recognition points listed below:

### **General letter and parcel bomb recognition points**

- Foreign mail, airmail and special delivery.
- Restrictive markings, such as confidential, personal, etc.
- Excessive postage. (Usually stamps - not meter strips).
- Handwritten or poorly typed addresses.
- Incorrect titles.
- Titles, but no names.
- Misspellings of common words.
- Oily stains or discoloration.
- No return address.
- Excessive weight.
- Rigid envelope.
- Lopsided or uneven envelope.
- Protruding wires or tinfoil.
- Excessive security materials, such as masking tape, string, etc.
- Visual distractions.

### **Specific letter & parcel bomb screening points**

It should be emphasized the general screening procedure is by no means foolproof. Specific terrorist tactics, packaging, or mailing patterns will render certain elements of the screening process invalid. However, other elements of

the screening process will continue to remain valid, plus new/specific elements can be added, via warning bulletins, etc., during periods of specific terrorist activity as they become known, (e.g., dismantling of a bomb currently being used and disseminating its description).

### **Specification handling procedures for suspected postal bombs encountered during screening**

When the mail center coordinator is notified of a suspect item, the coordinator's actions should, in general, be those listed below:

- Ask the employee to write down what recognition point or points in the screening process alerted him/her to the item (excessive postage; no return address; rigid envelope; feel, etc.).
- Alert the remaining employees a suspect postal item has been found, the points of recognition, and to remain clear of the isolation area.
- Place suspect item in holding/carrying container and take it to the isolation area.
- Without making direct contact with the suspect postal item, record from all sides of the item all the available information, such as name and address of addressee, name and return address or sender, postmark, cancellation date, post office codes, types of stamps, and any other markings or labels found on the item. Any other peculiarities associated with the item such as oil stains, tears, flap sealed with tape, flaps not glued down, etc., should also be recorded. (IMPORTANT NOTE: Be sure to copy information in exact spelling and location relationships.)
- Contact management and security and inform them a suspect postal item has been detected through the screening process.
- Inform the police and postal inspectors giving all information recorded from the suspect postal item.

When management or security receives the notification of a suspect postal item from the mail center coordinator, his/her actions should, in general, follow these guidelines:

- Accurately record all information pertaining to the suspect item in an incident log, taking care that all information taken from the item is accurately recorded.
- (Optional Step) If at all possible, dispatch a security officer with a Polaroid camera to photograph all sides of the suspect postal item, without moving it, as it rests in the holding container. Exact details of the item markings are thus made available for study and use by the bomb scene officer.
- Contact the addressee of the suspect postal item for identification/verification of the postal item by asking specific questions. (Identification/verification questions are presented below.)
- If identification/verification cannot be accomplished within a reasonable period of time, notify the police bomb squad that a suspect postal item has been detected by the mail screening process and has been placed in the holding container in the isolation area awaiting their arrival. (Be sure to give proper location of the holding area and the name of the person the responding bomb squad should ask for.)
- Notify appropriate top management level personnel of the detection, through mail screening, of a suspect postal item.
- Stand by to offer in-house assistance to the police bomb squad upon their arrival.

#### **Identification/verification of suspect postal item by addressee and/or sender**

Before calling the bomb squad, the security officer should attempt to find out if the sender or addressee of the suspect postal item has any knowledge of the item or its contents. If the addressee can positively identify the suspect item, it may be opened by security with relative safety. If only the sender can be

contacted and can identify the item and contents, a management decision must be made as to the reliability of the information.

Below are sample questions to ask the addressee/sender during the identification/verification process:

- Is the addressee familiar with the name and address of the sender?
- Is the addressee expecting correspondence from the sender? If so, what is the nature of the correspondence?
- If correspondence is expected, what would be the contents of the item and its approximate size?
- If the sender is unknown, is the addressee expecting any other business correspondence from the city, state or country of origin of the suspect postal item?
- Is the addressee aware of any friends, relatives, service personnel, or business acquaintances currently on vacation or on business trips in the area of origin?
- Has the addressee purchased or ordered any merchandise, information, gifts, books, photographs, magazines, or paintings from any business concern whose parent organization might be located in the city, state or country of origin?
- If suspect item has overseas markings (e.g., stamps, postmark, address)
- Has the addressee recently purchased in the United States or elsewhere a wrist watch, camera, sporting firearm, automobile, radio, jewelry or other personal item that may have originally been manufactured in any foreign country and for which a warranty, registration or guarantee card was mailed?
- Has the addressee returned for repair, reconditioning, adjustment, or replacement any items, such as a camera, wrist watch, sporting firearm or radio, which was manufactured in a foreign country and which may have been transshipped so the required work could be performed?

- Can the addressee think of any reason whatsoever why he/she would be receiving mail from an overseas area?
- Has the addressee recently joined or contributed to any charitable, civil, religious, or international organization which might originate correspondence from the city, state, or country of address of the item?

### **Establishing an isolation area for suspect postal items**

When the mail screening process identifies a suspect item, it is essential to rapidly remove the potential bomb from the work flow and personnel and to place it in an area of isolation. The security officer and the mail center coordinator should jointly evaluate the spaces or areas available around the mail center and select one that offers a degree of isolation where a suspect postal item may be placed pending identification and/or the arrival of the police bomb squad. In selecting and creating the isolation area, the following points should serve as general guidelines:

- The isolation area should be easily accessible from the mail screening area.
- In hand transporting a suspect postal item from the screening area to the isolation area, it should not be necessary to move into or through areas of high employee population or heavy traffic.
- If at all possible, access to the isolation area should not involve the opening of doors, climbing of stairs, or passage through areas of clutter or poor illumination.
- The total distance from the mail screening area to the isolation area should not exceed 50 yards, whenever possible.
- The isolation area should, whenever possible, be located outdoors and sheltered from the elements (a covered truck loading dock or an open shed area).