

BOMB THREATS

Protecting Corporate and Agency Mail-Centers

By Douglas Rhodes, Staff Reporter

The chances of your company or agency receiving a bomb in the mail are minimal but you must never assume it won't happen. You must have a comprehensive bomb threat response plan in place, it must be tested regularly and everyone must know what their role is.

When properly planned and implemented, a bomb threat response plan will prevent any such incident from creating panic among your workforce or inflicting physical harm to your employees or facilities.

Your vulnerability depends on a variety of factors - both internal and external. Experience has shown that no individual or organization is completely immune from attack. A sound assessment of your vulnerability is critical to the preparation of a bomb threat response plan.

Consider the following possible sources of danger in evaluating your firm's vulnerability:

- Foreign terrorism - Does your firm have foreign officers, suppliers or outlets? If so, in what countries? Are you doing business in countries where there is political unrest or civil strife?
- Domestic hate groups - Is your firm a high-profile organization whose services, research or products are the subjects of public controversy?
- Workplace Violence - Has your firm experienced a recent downsizing, takeover or reorganization requiring layoffs? Has any employee complained of being physically abused, harassed or of being "stalked"? Has any employee made threats to harm any other employee or the firm?
- Does your organization provide products, materials, technical assistance, or operate facilities within any country involved or

connected with current terrorist activity or any government suffering domestic unrest?

- Has your organization refused to do business with, withdrawn from, or failed to successfully negotiate business contracts with companies, organizations or governments within the last two years that are affiliated with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 or represent countries suffering domestic unrest?
- Does your organization manufacture or produce weapons or military support items for international arms trade that would normally bear markings identifying the organization as the manufacturer?
- Does your organization support political or social causes that would make it a likely target for radical domestic "hate" groups?
- Has any member of your organization's management made public statements or authored papers on any facet of current terrorist activity or topics, or taken any controversial public position?
- Has any employee advised that he or she has been the target of physical violence or harassing activities, such as threatening phone calls or threats?
- Has any employee (current or former) threatened violence against either the organization or another employee in connection with a real or alleged grievance?

Positive answers to any of these questions will help you and your security manager identify potential sources of bombs or bomb threats.

Why do People Send Mail Bombs?

There is a popular stereotype of the typical mail bomber as a person motivated by radical political beliefs. However, law enforcement authorities find that revenge is the motivation that most often "triggers" a mail bomb or bomb threat.

Postal inspectors have found that mail bombs generally target specific individuals. Placed devices, however, are generally intended to disrupt organizations and injure indiscriminately. Bomb threats may target either individuals or organizations.

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Bomb Threat Response Plan

Your bomb threat response plan should be part of an overall corporate security program, addressing all personnel and physical security issues. If no such plan exists, individuals from management and security should be appointed to formulate the bomb threat response plan. Postal inspectors recommend including the mail-center manager or a designee in the planning group because that person, as Mail-Center Security Coordinator, will be responsible for the mail screening program.



SUSPICIOUS MAIL GUIDELINES

Should you receive a suspicious letter or package:

- Handle with care. Don't shake or bump.
- Don't open, smell, touch or taste.
- Isolate it immediately.
- Treat it as suspect.
- Call local law enforcement authorities.

If a letter/parcel is open and/or a threat is identified . . .

For a Bomb:

- Evacuate Immediately
- Call Police
- Contact Postal Inspectors
- Call Local Fire Department/HAZMAT Unit

For Radiological:

- Limit Exposure - Don't Handle
- Distance (Evacuate Area)
- Shield Yourself From Object
- Call Police
- Contact Postal Inspectors
- Call Local Fire Department/HAZMAT Unit

For Biological or Chemical:

- Isolate - Don't Handle
- Wash Your Hands With Soap and Warm Water
- Call Police
- Contact Postal Inspectors
- Call Local Fire Department/HAZMAT Unit

Representatives from management, security and the mail-center should form the nucleus of a Command Center working group to deal with any emergency where bombs or bomb threats must be confronted. Members of the Command Center working group, and their alternates, should be specified by name and title. Most importantly, Command Center members should have authority to make important decisions as to how the firm will respond to any bomb threat situation, including evacuation of company facilities.

The Command Center must be at or near the communications center of the organization. The Command Center should be equipped with telephone numbers for police, postal inspectors, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF), the fire department and emergency medical services. An employee roster with all current telephone numbers, including home, office, pagers and cellular phones should be maintained. Current copies of the firm's floor plans or building blueprints are also of critical importance.

Preparation should include planning for evacuation routes and alternates easily adapted from fire escape routes, and evacuation signals. Evacuation routes should be furnished to all supervisors. However, fire alarms should not be used to signal an emergency bomb response evacuation. The possibility exists that a bomber would target routes, such as stairwells and/or emergency exits, normally used during an evacuation due to a fire alarm.

Your local police and fire departments should be contacted about their respective bomb search policies. In the event of a threat, will they help conduct the search? If so, what will they need from your Command Center?

The bomb threat response plan must include provisions to ensure that non-postal deliveries (except commercial shipments) are channeled through the mail-center. Since all organizations receive mail and other parcel deliveries, a mail screening program, through which all parcel deliveries are channeled, is an essential component of this process.

By the same token, telephone threats received by receptionists or others, should be brought to the attention of the security officer and then relayed to the mail-center manager, who needs to be informed of any specific information which would assist the mail screening process.

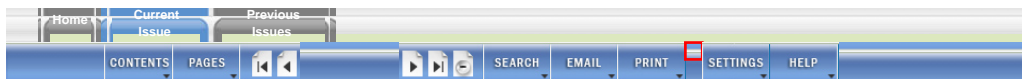
Lastly, the bomb threat response plan should encompass all facilities at the site, including outbuildings, and parking lots or garages immediately adjacent to buildings occupied by employees. If the organization maintains offices at multiple sites, security officers at each site must be included in the communications loop.

Since the majority of explosive devices are placed, not mailed, it is imperative that your security plan includes sound controls over those who can physically gain access and move about your facility and the immediate surroundings. Such steps can reduce much of your risk.

Note: Any plan is useless unless it tested. Run frequent exercises so that any problem areas can be ironed out and that everyone know what to do.

Mail-Center Security Coordinator

Management should ensure that the mail-center security coordinator and an alternate are mature, responsible and emotionally stable. This selection should be made from those persons already participating and trained in the overall bomb threat response plan.



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Duties of the mail-center coordinator:

- The coordinator must oversee the mail screening process, seeing that all deliveries are channeled to the mail-center, train employees in detecting suspicious packages, verifications, safe handling, and communications with security and management in any crisis.
- The function of the coordinator is to assume command of the situation when mail-center employees identify a suspicious package 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 those employees, in general, do not cluster around the item out of curiosity.
- The coordinator will then notify management directly, provide them with specific details of the item and carry out the remaining steps of the plan under the direction of management and security.

Screening Procedures

Incoming mail in any organization follows much the same pattern. Bags or bundles of mail and other courier deliveries 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 immediately). 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. This is critical because those individuals are most likely to notice packages that are out of the ordinary.

This procedure can also be used when an employee, who has already received the package, is concerned that it may contain an explosive device. This normally results from some personal situation that may or may not have been brought to management's attention.

It is important to remember that the general screening procedures of incoming mail and packages are by no means foolproof. In many cases, the only person to detect anything suspicious about a package is the ultimate recipient. For this reason, mail-bomb recognition points should be distributed company-wide to all employees to increase employee sensitivity to this threat.

Response Procedures

On notification that a suspicious package has been found, the mail-center coordinator should:

1. Ask the employee to write down the specific recognition point(s) in the screening process that caused the alert (excessive postage, no return address, rigid envelope, lopsided package or strange odor).
2. Alert the remaining employees that a suspicious package has been found, the points of recognition, and to remain clear of the isolation area.
3. Place the suspect item in a reinforced container and take it to the isolation area.
4. Record from each side of the item all the available information (name and address of addressee and of sender,

postmark, cancellation date, types of stamps, and any other markings or labels found on the item).

5. Contact management and security and inform them a suspicious item has been detected through the screening process.
6. Inform the police and postal inspectors (if mailed) giving all information recorded from the suspect item.

When management or security receives the notification from the mail-center coordinator, their actions should, in general, follow these guidelines:

1. Accurately record all information pertaining to the suspect item in an incident log.
2. If at all possible, dispatch a security officer with a camera to photograph all sides of the suspect 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.
3. Contact the addressee of the suspicious package for verification of the item by asking specific questions.
4. Attempt to resolve the verification by contacting the "sender" as indicated on the suspicious package's return address. If the return addressee proves to be fictitious (a serious indication that the parcel may be dangerous) or you cannot locate the sender within a reasonable period of time, notify the police and postal inspectors that a suspicious package 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 responding authorities the specific location of the holding area and the mail-center coordinator's or security officer's name.)
5. Notify appropriate management-level personnel of the detection, through mail screening, of a suspicious package.
6. Stand by to offer in-house assistance to the police and postal inspectors upon their arrival.

Establishing an Isolation Area for Suspicious Packages

When the mail screening process identifies a suspect item, it is essential to rapidly remove personnel from the area and the potential bomb from the workflow. The potential bomb should be placed in a carrying container and taken to a designated isolation area. Security personnel and the mail-center coordinator should jointly evaluate the spaces or areas available around the mail-center and select one which offers a degree of isolation where a parcel may be placed pending verification and/or the arrival of the police. 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.
- While 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.
- The isolation area, whenever possible, should be located outdoors and sheltered from the elements (a covered loading dock or an open shed area).