

Human Resources, Logistical Services & Public Safety

## **Procedures for Handling Suspicious Letters, Packages, and Bio-Threats**

Western Michigan University is committed to ensuring the safety of our students, faculty, and staff. In light of recent acts of bio-terrorism around the country, many of us are concerned about the safety of items sent through the mail. To reduce the probability that anyone handling mail at the University could be exposed to false or real safety and health threats (biological, chemical, bombs) via the mail, all members of the campus community are encouraged to become familiar with the following procedures. **Please disseminate this document to all individuals who handle or open mail.**

(Procedures are based on information provided by the FBI, Postal Service, Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, and the Department of State.)

### **Suspicious Mail**

**Awareness.** All faculty, staff, and students should maintain an enhanced awareness when handling and opening mail.

**Identifying.** Some typical characteristics of letters and packages which ought to trigger suspicion:

1. Excessive postage, no postage, or non-canceled postage.
2. No return address or fictitious return address.
3. Misspelling words or improper addressing.
4. Mail addressed to a Title or Office only, or to an incorrect Title or Office.
5. Unexpected mail from foreign countries.
6. Suspicious or threatening messages written on exterior of mail.
7. Postmark showing different location than return address.
8. Distorted handwriting or "cut and paste" lettering.
9. Unprofessionally wrapped packages or excessive use of tape, strings, etc.
10. Packages marked as "Fragile-Handle with Care," "Rush-Do Not Delay," "Personal," or "Confidential."
11. Rigid, uneven, irregular, or lopsided packages.
12. Packages that are discolored, oily, leaking substances, or have an unusual odor or ticking sound.
13. Packages with soft spots, bulges, or excessive weight.
14. Protruding wires or aluminum foil.
15. Visual distractions.

**Action—If you are uncomfortable about a letter or package:**

1. Do not open it.
2. Do not shake or empty out its contents.
3. Cover the item with anything available (trash can, paper, etc.) and DO NOT remove this cover.
4. Wash your hands with an antibacterial product.
5. Notify your supervisor and Public Safety (7-5555).
6. Leave the room and close the door or section off the area to keep others away from the item.
7. Prepare a list of people who were in the room or area when the suspicious item was recognized or who may have handled the item.

### **Items With Threats or Unidentified Substances**

#### **Action—If you open a letter or package with a threat or containing an unidentified substance:**

- A. If the package **DOES NOT** contain a substance:
  - 1 No one, including the person who opened the item, is at immediate risk, however:
  - 2 Notify your supervisor and Public Safety (7-5555).
  
- B. If the package **DOES** contain a substance:
  - 1. Do not panic. Remain calm and follow these instructions.
  - 2. Do not shake or empty out its contents.
  - 3. Do not touch, taste, smell, or try to identify the substance.
  - 4. Do not carry the item to another location; leave item where it is.
  - 5. Cover the item with anything available (trash can, paper, etc.) and **DO NOT** remove this cover.
  - 6. Turn off any circulating fans, air conditioners, or heaters.
  - 7. Wash your hands with an antibacterial product. If you touched the substance, do not touch your face.
  - 8. Notify your supervisor and Public Safety (7-5555).
  - 9. Leave the room and close the door or section off the area to keep others away from the item. You should remain in the area to minimize spread of the substance.
  - 10. Alert others to keep away from your area (supervisor should take on this task).
  - 11. Wait for emergency personnel to arrive and follow their instructions regarding changing of clothing and further decontamination.
  - 12. Prepare a list of people who were in the room or area with the item.

#### **Action—If there is a small explosion or aerosol spray from a letter or package:**

- 1. Vacate the space immediately and prevent others from entering.
- 2. Notify your supervisor and Public Safety (7-5555).
- 3. Wash your hands with an antibacterial product. If you touched the substance, do not touch your face.
- 4. Wait for emergency personnel to arrive and follow their instructions regarding changing of clothing and further decontamination.
- 5. Prepare a list of people who were in the room or area with the item.

### **For More Information**

You can find more information about bio-threats on the following Web sites:

- 1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
- 2. Federal Bureau of Investigation: [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov)
- 3. Environmental Protection Agency, Chemical Emergency Preparedness & Prevention Office: [www.epa.gov/swercepp/](http://www.epa.gov/swercepp/)
- 4. United States Postal Service: <http://www.usps.com/news/2001/press/>