



MARCH 15, 2005

HEALTH ALERT NETWORK
HEALTH ADVISORY

Suspicious Package Protocol

Earlier today a Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Health Advisory was provided through the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) reporting preliminary positive testing of *Bacillus Anthracis* (Anthrax) from samples taken at a Pentagon mail facility in Washington D.C. on March 10. The advisory encourages clinicians and public health agencies to heighten their surveillance for typical symptoms and exposure history for *B.anthraxis*.

Based on the above actions, we ask that you distribute the attached recently revised Suspicious Package Protocol to the first responders with whom you work.

If you have any suggested changes to the attached documents, please send them to Kathleen Donahue, N.D. Division Emergency Management, at kdonahue@state.nd.us, or contact her at (701) 328-8113.

**GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSING SUSPICIOUS MAIL
PARCELS OR OTHER SUBSTANCES**

The following guidelines for assessing suspicious mail, parcels or other substances have been prepared by the N.D. Department of Health (NDDoH) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)/Fargo Resident Agent in consultation with the N.D. Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI), the N.D. Highway Patrol (NDHP), and the N.D. Division of Emergency Management (DEM).

These guidelines, developed to assist first responders, refer only to those threats that originate in North Dakota.¹

Notification of an Incident Related to Suspicious Mail, Parcels or Other Substances

Initial notification/consultation regarding a perceived threat from suspicious mail, parcels or other suspicious substances should be conducted in coordination with local law enforcement and the local/regional public health unit².

¹ Bioterrorism is a federal crime and the FBI has jurisdiction.

² In some areas, the local/regional public health unit may have determined that this response should be delegated to another organization or agency, such as Bismarck Fire and Inspections in Bismarck. Even though the response may be delegated to another agency, it is expected that the local/regional public health unit will be involved in the coordination of the necessary follow-up. When "local/regional public health" is used in this guidance, it refers to the agency determined to be designated for the response.

Prior to an assessment to determine if the item poses a threat, appropriate precautions, such as disabling the heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system and initial evacuation of the immediate area or, if necessary, the entire building, should be instituted. The local/regional public health unit will provide consultation and assistance regarding initial precautions.

Attachment 1 contains detailed guidelines regarding suspicious packages. The following are recommendations for recipients of suspicious packages.

- Report the incident to an available supervisor or building security official.
- Do not shake or empty the contents of any suspicious envelope or package.
- Do not smell, taste, or touch the material.
- Do not try to clean up powders or liquids.
- Turn off local fans or ventilation units in the room, if possible.
- Leave the room and close the door, and/or section off the area, to prevent others from entering. (continued on next page)
- Instruct anyone who handled the item to wash their hands with soap and water.
- Remove contaminated clothing and place in a sealed plastic bag if materials spill onto clothing. Shower with soap and water as soon as possible. Do not use bleach or harsh disinfectant on your skin.
- Obtain, if possible, a list of all people who handled the letter/package or were in the room or area when the letter/package was recognized or opened.

Assessment of Suspicious Mail, Parcels or Other Substances

A **RISK ASSESSMENT** of the envelope/package for explosives, radioactivity or other risks to handlers must be conducted by the local hazardous materials (HAZMAT) team or other professionals who have the appropriate expertise and personal protective equipment to conduct the assessment. This assessment may require radiological monitoring, X-ray or other evaluation of the object. ***All situations must be assessed by the local law enforcement agency.*** Guidelines to determine if the object poses a threat are provided in Attachment 1.

- If the assessment indicates the item poses no threat to human health and/or no suspicious substance is found, the object should be disposed of according to local law enforcement procedures.
- If the local law enforcement agency indicates there appears to be evidence that the parcel, package or other item may constitute a threat to human health, local law enforcement should contact the:
 - ***Local/ regional public health unit (if that notification has not already been conducted).***

The local/ regional public health unit will contact the:

- **Case Manager of the NDDoH via North Dakota Emergency Management/State Radio at 800- 472-2121. The NDDoH Case Manager will notify the NDDoH Emergency Preparedness and Response Section, the Division of Disease Control and the Environmental Health Section.**

If, after the consultation with the NDDoH, it is determined that the object should be tested, and the object **has been determined to be safe for transportation and testing**, the NDDoH will assign a control number before the object is transported for testing. Unknown substances will be tested for both biological and environmental hazards. Separate samples must be obtained for biological and environmental testing. The NDDoH will provide consultation to assure the biological and environmental samples have been appropriately gathered and packaged. Communication with the NDDoH should occur before the samples are collected and packaged.

If there is concurrence between the local/regional public health unit and local law enforcement that the object poses a credible risk, local law enforcement will notify the:

- **North Dakota Homeland Security Fusion Center via the State Operations Center at 1-866-885-8295 (during business hours), and after hours, 1-800-472-2121 and request State Radio to page the Fusion Center.**
- **The Fusion Center will contact the Federal Bureau of Investigation at 701-232-7241.**

Once a control number is assigned by the NDDoH, the North Dakota Highway Patrol (NDHP) district office will be contacted by the local/regional public health unit to arrange for transportation of the object for testing. Transportation kits have been provided by the NDDoH at all NDHP district offices. In the Bismarck area, transportation of the object to the laboratory may be provided by alternative methods.

- If a transportation kit provided by the NDDoH is not available or the object can not be transported in the kit, consultation between the local/regional public health unit, NDDoH, Public Health Laboratory, FBI and the NDHP must be conducted before an alternative method of transport is determined.
- The NDDoH contacts the **North Dakota Division of Emergency Management React Officer via State Radio at 328-9921 or 800-472-2121.**

The NDHP will contact the NDDoH Case Manager via State Radio to notify them of the transportation start time and the estimated time of arrival. The NDHP will again contact the NDDoH, through State Radio, within 20 to 30 minutes of arrival. State Radio will contact the NDDoH Case Manager, who will make appropriate laboratory notifications. The package should be promptly transported to the NDDoH laboratories - 2635 East Main, Bismarck, West parking lot.

NOTE: The package should not enter the laboratory until properly screened and reviewed by the laboratory directors and/or the chemical or biological personnel. This is especially critical during working hours when the exterior door is unlocked. Normal hours of operation are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. A reasonable attempt should be conducted to deliver the material during those hours.

Appropriate Chain of Custody Procedures must be maintained throughout the investigation.

Procedures for Laboratory Testing and Results

Upon arrival of the NDHP at the NDDoH laboratories another assessment of the object will be conducted to ensure the object can be safely handled and allowed into the laboratory building. Once cleared for entry and following established laboratory protocols, the sample will be transported into the laboratory at which time the testing to assess the hazard will continue.

The time period for available results will depend on when the laboratory receives the sample, and the types of testing conducted on the product.

- The NDDoH will telephone test results to:
 - The local/regional public health unit,
 - The FBI, and
 - DEM

Negative Results

The local/regional public health unit will notify the originating sender, local law enforcement/fire department/HAZMAT, the District Highway Patrol Office and other persons who may have been in contact with the object.

Positive Results

If the laboratory analysis indicates the agent is hazardous, the local/regional public health unit, in consultation with the NDDoH and the FBI, will provide information for appropriate follow-up and will coordinate the actions.

- Notification of the sender will be conducted in coordination with the FBI and the local/regional public health unit. It is imperative that someone with health and medical expertise be present to provide health information to the sender and others who may have been in contact with the object.
- The NDDoH will contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and/or Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and the North Dakota State Veterinarians Office if appropriate to report the identification of any Select Agents.

Important Telephone Numbers

North Dakota Homeland Security Fusion Center.....866-885-8295
(during business hours)
800-472-2121
(after hours)

Federal Bureau of Investigation.....701-232-7241

North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH).....800-472-2121 (via State
Radio)
*Request the NDDoH Case Manager
be paged.*

North Dakota Division of Emergency Management/.....800-472-2121
State Radio

ATTACHMENT 1
GUIDELINES TO EVALUATE THE THREAT OF AN OBJECT

- Is there an explicit threat (substance need not be present)? Yes No
- Is the object suspicious for a bomb or other hazardous material, e.g., ticking, protruding wires or foil or unexplained material leaking from package? Yes No
- Does the material have a suspicious odor? Yes No
- Does the letter or package have other suspicious characteristics such as:
 - ◆ Excessive postage? Yes No
 - ◆ Handwritten or poorly typed addresses? Yes No
 - ◆ Incorrect titles? Yes No
 - ◆ Title, but no name? Yes No
 - ◆ Misspellings of common words? Yes No
 - ◆ No return address/unknown return address? Yes No
 - ◆ Excessive weight? Yes No
 - ◆ Lopsided or uneven envelope? Yes No
 - ◆ Excessive security materials (e.g., heavily taped)? Yes No
 - ◆ Visual distractions? Yes No
 - ◆ Marked with restrictive endorsements (e.g., “Personal” or “Confidential”)? Yes No
- Does the letter or package have material present, whether opened or unopened (e.g., powder spilling), and:
 - ◆ Has material been confirmed by another independent party? Yes No
 - ◆ Is there a logical explanation for the letter/package or material? Yes No
 - ◆ Is the letter/package “suspicious” because:
 - It is unfamiliar? Yes No
 - It has no return address? Yes No
 - Return address is unknown to recipient or follow-up indicates return address is nonexistent or otherwise “suspicious?” Yes No

Categories of Health Alert messages:

- Health Alert conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.
- Health Advisory provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.
- Health Update provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary.
- Health Information provides general information that is not necessarily considered to be of an emergent nature.

This message is being sent to local public health units, clinics, hospitals, tribal health, North Dakota Healthcare Association, and hospital public information officers.