



APTA STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM
RECOMMENDED PRACTICE

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Safe Mail and Package Handling

Abstract: This *Recommended Practice* covers the receipt of mail and packages to transit agencies.

Keywords: CBRNE, mail, package handling, transit

Summary: A safe mail and package handling plan allows a transit agency to implement basic safety procedures for general mail and package handling and additional safety measures for employees during times of heightened security. A number of federal agencies have developed detailed mail-handling procedures that are available on the Internet (see References). Based on the size of the transit agency, the personnel responsible for receiving, opening and delivering mail or packages should participate in training regarding this *Recommended Practice*.

Scope and purpose: This *Recommended Practice* provides basic guidelines needed to develop a safe mail and package handling plan. Guidelines include information on training, normal mail handling safety measures, handling of suspicious mail and personal protective equipment. Although the actual risk of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, explosives (CBRNE) exposure through the handling of mail is relatively small, development of a mail handling plan and supporting procedures provides some assurance to those employees responsible for handling packages and mail. The purpose of this *Recommended Practice* is to provide guidelines to transit agencies for the development of plans and procedures in order to limit employee exposure caused by CBRNE exposure.

Summary of Recommendations:

- Perform an assessment to review existing procedures
- Make response consistent with Emergency Response Plan
- Train employees on proper handling procedures
- Post information in central location where mail is initially received and handled

This Recommended Practice represents a common viewpoint of those parties concerned with its provisions, namely, transit operating/planning agencies, manufacturers, consultants, engineers and general interest groups. The application of any standards, practices or guidelines contained herein is voluntary. In some cases, federal and/or state regulations govern portions of a rail transit system's operations. In those cases, the government regulations take precedence over this standard. APTA recognizes that for certain applications, the standards or practices, as implemented by individual transit agencies, may be either more or less restrictive than those given in this document.

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The American Public Transportation Association greatly appreciates the contributions of the Security Standards Working Group – Security Emergency Management, which provided the primary effort in the drafting of this *Recommended Practice*.

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1. Assessment

Transit agencies should perform an assessment to review existing procedures in order to determine if processes currently in place are meeting the growing and changing mail and package handling protocols or if new or additional agency protocols should be implemented. The review process would include examining the following:

- The personnel at the agency responsible for the safe handling of mail and packages.
- Delivery acceptance standards, including how and where mail and packages enter the agency.
- Characteristics of suspicious mail and packages.
- Responsible personnel's ability to identify a suspicious letter or package.
- The internal distribution process.
- Emergency response procedures in case a suspicious letter or package is discovered.

The response to an incident should be consistent with the each agency's emergency response plan.

In addition, the assessment should look at how an agency's safe mail and package handling plan integrates with other existing emergency plans and procedures. For example:

- Bomb threat procedures.
- Facility evacuation procedures.
- Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP), should a biohazard occur and an area or facility be shut down.
- Depending upon the National Homeland Security alert levels and the intelligence of potential threats, the transit agency should consider the appropriate protective equipment for their mail handlers.
- Review and assessment of the application of this *Recommended Practice* should be consistent with the agency's document review policy.

2. Training

The transit agency should consider the following elements with regard to training:

- Identify what constitutes a suspicious mail or package.
- Use personal protective equipment (PPE) deemed appropriate for the task.
- Take the proper steps should a suspicious mail or package be received.
- Conduct periodic drills to test procedures concerning the identification handling and response to suspicious mail and packages and to determine whether additional training or updates are necessary.

As part of an agency's training efforts, the local branch of the U.S. Postal Service can be contacted to provide, at no cost, recommendations for the handling and identification of suspicious mail and packages. The local office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) also can be contacted for such training.

3. Implementation

Visibly post the following information in central locations receiving mail and packages:

- internal and external notification and emergency procedures
- emergency contact numbers
- information posters and bulletins from the FBI and U.S. Postal Service

References

U.S. Postal Service. <http://www.usps.com/>

U.S. Department of Labor. <http://www.dol.gov/>

Federal Emergency Management Administration. <http://www.fema.gov/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/>

Federal Bureau of Investigations. <http://www.fbi.gov/>

Abbreviations and acronyms

COOP	Continuity of Operations Plan
HVAC	heating, ventilating and air conditioning
PPE	personal protective equipment
CBRNE	chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, explosive