Recognizing and Responding to Unattended Packages, Objects and Baggage

Abstract: This Recommended Practice provides broad guidelines for recognizing and responding to unattended packages, objects and baggage.

Keywords: baggage, object, package, suspicious, unattended

Summary: Transit employees are the eyes and ears of an agency’s operations and services and play a vital role in the safety and security of fellow employees and passengers. This Recommended Practice provides broad guidelines for recognizing and responding to unattended packages, objects and baggage within the transit system.

Scope and purpose: This Recommended Practice is applicable to all transit agencies, regardless of size or mode. It is not intended to substitute for federal, state or local laws and regulatory requirements. This document offers a baseline set of recommendations to assist transit agencies in their recognition of and response to unattended items. This document complements APTA’s Recommended Practice “Identifying Suspicious Behavior in Mass Transit,” published in 2010. The purpose of this Recommended Practice is to provide transit agencies with broad-level guidelines for evolving their own policies and procedures for instructing employees in recognizing and responding to items that are unattended. This document also is intended to enhance the security awareness of transit employees by providing procedures for recognizing and responding to unattended items.
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Recognizing and Responding to Unattended Packages, Objects and Baggage

1. Overview
This Recommended Practice provides broad guidelines for recognizing and responding to unattended packages, objects and baggage. Throughout this document, the term “item” will be used to describe packages, objects and baggage. Transit employees are considered the eyes and ears of the agency’s operations and services and play a vital role in the safety and security of fellow employees and passengers. Moreover, programs such as the Transit Watch program’s “Be Alert” and “Is that Your Bag?” campaigns (sponsored by the Federal Transit Administration [FTA], Amalgamated Transit Union [ATU], American Public Transportation Association [APTA] and Transportation Security Administration [TSA]) as well as TSA’s “Not On My Shift” employee security awareness campaign educate employees and passengers on how to recognize and respond to unattended items. This Recommended Practice includes criteria for recognizing characteristics of unattended items. The policies and procedures developed by transit agencies to instruct employees may include the following criteria for the recognition of and response to unattended items:

- procedures to follow upon observing unattended items within the transit system
- procedures to follow upon identifying unattended items
- procedures on how to properly communicate suspicious items to other transit personnel; local, state and federal law enforcement; and other appropriate agencies
- procedures on emergency egress paths, exit locations and emergency equipment use.

2. Guidelines on unattended items
Each transit agency should create guidelines and instructions on employee recognition of, response to, and reporting of unattended items. Agencies should conduct a review of their current policies and procedures and create guidelines and instructions that coincide with the security goals and potential threats identified by the organization. Coordination with transit security/police and/or local law enforcement officials will ensure a unified approach and facilitate collaborative efforts if warranted by the circumstances surrounding the discovered and reported unattended item. Guidelines on recognition of, response to, and reporting of unattended items are provided in this document. The TSA has developed prefabricated cards for transit agencies to distribute to all personnel. Examples can be seen in Section 3.

Security awareness training should include guidance on recognizing and responding to unattended items. Please see the APTA Recommended Practice “Security Training for Transit Employees” for further information on available training resources.

2.1 General guidelines for determining which items are suspicious
All transit agency employees play a vital role in ensuring the safety and security of every customer within the transit system. Employees must remain alert for unattended items located within the transit system. Suspicion is based on place, circumstances and time. Not all unattended items are suspicious items. Generally anything that is Hidden, Obviously suspicious and not Typical (HOT) should be deemed suspicious. Usually, items left
in conspicuous areas such as on seats, in a restroom, next to a phone booth or vending machine, or on a station platform are simply forgotten or discarded items.

In this context, employees should recognize the following as suspicious:

- Any unattended item incongruous to that location (e.g., a suitcase at a non-airport bus or train station).
- Any unattended item located in an out-of-the-way place where it is not readily visible.
- Any unattended item that matches something described in a reported threat or has a threatening note attached.
- Any unattended item that has visible wires, batteries, a clock or timer, bottles, tanks or bags attached.
- Any unattended item that is abandoned by someone quickly leaving the area.
- Any unattended item emitting an odor, mist or oily liquid, or leaking a powdery substance.

2.2 Responding to suspicious items

If an immediate threat is perceived, employees should remain calm and encourage evacuation from the affected area.

**NOTE:** An immediate threat could include but is not limited to an incident in which an employee observes two or more customers becoming similarly disabled (e.g., seizure, convulsions, breathing difficulties, loss of consciousness) with no other obvious cause(s) (e.g., smoke condition, pepper spray).

Employees should consider the following guidelines for recognizing or responding to suspicious unattended items:

- Do not touch an item that has been deemed suspicious.
- Do not use a radio or cell phone if an explosive device is suspected. It is recommended that no calls or transmissions be made within a distance of 300 feet from the device. It is recommended that a landline be used instead of wireless communications.
- Adhere to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Department of Homeland Security guidance for stand-off distances (see Figure 1 below).
- Immediately make notifications through appropriate channels, providing your name, location and a description of the items.
- Be prepared to provide security and/or law enforcement arriving on scene with descriptions of the object, the location of the object, the suspicious nature of the object and, if applicable, a description of any people associated with the object.

Also consider the following steps:

- Don personal protective equipment (if provided by the agency).
- Leave the area as quickly as possible, and do not attempt to lend assistance if doing so delays your own escape. Do not re-enter the area once you have evacuated everyone.
- Advise employees or customers to not enter the affected area.
- Await direction from your supervisor, control center, police or emergency responders.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threat Description - Improvised Explosive Device (IED)</th>
<th>Explosives Capacity(^1) (TNT Equivalent)</th>
<th>Building Evacuation Distance(^2)</th>
<th>Outdoor Evacuation Distance(^3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pipe Bomb</td>
<td>5 LBS</td>
<td>70 FT</td>
<td>1200 FT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide Bomber</td>
<td>20 LBS</td>
<td>110 FT</td>
<td>1700 FT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briefcase/Suitcase</td>
<td>50 LBS</td>
<td>150 FT</td>
<td>1850 FT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car</td>
<td>500 LBS</td>
<td>320 FT</td>
<td>1500 FT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUV/Van</td>
<td>1,000 LBS</td>
<td>400 FT</td>
<td>2400 FT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Moving Van/ Delivery Truck</td>
<td>4,000 LBS</td>
<td>640 FT</td>
<td>3800 FT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving Van/ Water Truck</td>
<td>10,000 LBS</td>
<td>860 FT</td>
<td>5100 FT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Trailer</td>
<td>60,000 LBS</td>
<td>1570 FT</td>
<td>9300 FT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) These capacities are based on the maximum weight of explosive material that could reasonably fit in a container of similar size.

\(^2\) Personnel in buildings are provided a high degree of protection from death or serious injury; however, glass breakage and building debris may still cause some injuries. Unstrengthened buildings can be expected to sustain damage that approximates five percent of their replacement cost.

\(^3\) If personnel cannot enter a building to seek shelter they must evacuate to the minimum distance recommended by Outdoor Evacuation Distance. These distances are governed by the greater hazard of fragmentation distance, glass breakage or threshold for ear drum rupture.
2.3 Contacting the TSOC – Freedom Center

If a transit agency encounters a potential disruption or an actual disruption in service due to a suspicious unattended package, the agency should notify TSA’s Transportation Security Operation Center (TSOC) - Freedom Center - immediately in accordance with established practices and procedures. The TSOC serves as a 24/7-point of contact for all transportation security concerns related to all modes of transportation including mass transit operations. In such a situation, the transit agency should contact the TSOC Surface Watch Officer at 1-866-615-5150 and TSOC.St@dhs.gov. In doing so, the transit agency should attempt to provide information that is accurate and detailed, and be prepared to provide the following information:

- Transit agency name, date, time, and place of observations.
- Extent of potential or actual disruption (e.g., number of affected bus routes, rail lines, stations).
- A complete description of unattended package(s) and any related suspicious activity.
- Description of suspicious odor emanating from the unattended package (if applicable).
- Description of suspicious person or vehicle including license plate number, color, make, model, dents, or damage (if applicable).

For further information on reporting significant security concerns, see 49 CFR § 1580.203 (2010).

3. Examples of suspicious item brochures

The following industry brochures have been developed by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the National Transit Institute (NTI) in conjunction with the FTA.
FIGURE 2
DHS’s “What Makes a Package Suspicious?” Brochure

What makes a package suspicious?

If You See Something / Say Something

• The package is Hidden. Placed in an area not easily observed but high traffic or critical. Is there VIP/media activity?
  • The package is Obviously suspicious. Are wires showing, is it smoking, have fumes/odors, leaking or ticking?
  • The package is not in a Typical area. The package is in an area where found property is not typically located.

REMEMBER IT’S HOT DON’T TOUCH
Avoid Wireless Transmissions
NOTIFY YOUR SUPERVISOR & POLICE
FIGURE 3
NTI’s “Bus Operations” Pocket Guide

FIGURE 4
NTI’s “Commuter Bus & Terminal” Pocket Guide
References

American Public Transportation Association *Recommended Practices:*
“Security Training Objectives for Transit Employees,” 2010
“Identifying Suspicious Behavior in Mass Transit,” 2010
“A Public Awareness Communication Program for Security and Safety,” 2010


Federal Transit Administration, Transit Watch program, 2006.

National Transit Institute, System Security Awareness for Transit Employees training course.

National Transit Institute, Terrorist Activity Recognition and Reaction (TARR) training course.


Definitions

**item:** A package, object or piece of baggage that can be of virtually any size. It can be found anywhere and may have been placed intentionally or unintentionally. Whether the size of an envelope or a suitcase, it may conceal a device capable of injuring people or disrupting service.

**suspicious item:** An unattended package, object or piece of baggage that raises feelings of wariness or distrust because it is out of the ordinary for the time, place or circumstances. Suspicious items include those that are witnessed to have been purposely abandoned, are left in a secured area, or whose existence cannot be logically explained.

Abbreviations and acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APTA</td>
<td>American Public Transportation Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATU</td>
<td>Amalgamated Transit Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHS</td>
<td>Department of Homeland Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTA</td>
<td>Federal Transit Administration</td>
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<td>HOT</td>
<td>Hidden, Obviously suspicious and not Typical</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Transportation Security Administration</td>
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