



APTA SEM-SS-RP-008-09, Rev. 2

First Published: December 31, 2009

First Revision: February 21, 2020

Second Revision: July 31, 2026

**Security and Emergency Management
Working Group**

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 security and response procedures for routine mail and package handling, as well as additional safety and security measures for mail processing during times of heightened security. A number of federal agencies have developed detailed mail handling procedures that agencies may leverage to create strong protocols.



Foreword

The American Public Transportation Association is a standards development organization in North America. The process of developing standards is managed by the APTA Standards Program's Standards Development Oversight Council (SDOC). These activities are carried out through several standards policy and planning committees that have been established to address specific transportation modes, safety and security requirements, interoperability, and other topics.

APTA used a consensus-based process to develop this document and its continued maintenance, which is detailed in the [manual for the APTA Standards Program](#). This document was drafted in accordance with the approval criteria and editorial policy as described. Any trade name used in this document is information given for the convenience of users and does not constitute an endorsement.

This document was prepared by the Security and Emergency Management Working Group, as directed by the Security and Emergency Management Standards Policy and Planning Committee.

This document 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 recommended practices or guidelines contained herein is voluntary. APTA standards are mandatory to the extent incorporated by an applicable statute or regulation. In some cases, federal and/or state regulations govern portions of a transit agency's operations. In cases where there is a conflict or contradiction between an applicable law or regulation and this document, consult with a legal adviser to determine which document takes precedence.

This document supersedes APTA SS-SEM-RP-008-9, Rev. 1, which has been revised. Below is a summary of changes from the previous document version:

- Numbered document APTA SS-SEM-RP-008-9.
- Added an overview.
- Revised exercise guidance to reflect updated language and exercise risk mitigation.
- Updated and added planning considerations.
- Modernized references.



Table of Contents

Foreword	ii
Participants.....	iv
Introduction.....	iv
Scope and purpose	iv
1. Overview	1
2. Assessment	1
3. Planning considerations	1
4. Training	2
5. Exercises	2
Related APTA standards.....	3
References.....	3
Abbreviations and acronyms.....	3
Document history.....	3



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Introduction

This introduction is not part of APTA SEM-SS-RP-008-09, "Safe Mail and Package Handling."

APTA recommends the use of this document by:

- individuals or organizations that operate transit systems;
- individuals or organizations that contract with others for the operation of transit systems; and
- individuals or organizations that influence how transit systems are operated (including but not limited to consultants, designers and contractors).

Scope and purpose

This recommended practice provides basic guidelines to support transit agencies in implementing a safe mail and package handling plan. Recommendations address training, routine mail handling safety measures, identifying and handling suspicious mail, and use of personal protective equipment. Although the actual risk of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, explosives (CBRNE) exposure through the mail is relatively low, development of a mail handling plan and supporting procedures reassures employees and contributes to agency safety and security.

Safe Mail and Package Handling

1. Overview

Transit agencies should establish plans and procedures to address safe mail and package handling. Agency protocols should address both routine mail and package handling procedures, as well as additional safety and security measures during periods of elevated threats.

Effective mail and package handling protocols strengthen agency safety and security by helping protect staff and facilities from hazardous materials, supporting the identification of suspicious items, preventing exposure and contamination, and reassuring agency staff.

2. Assessment

Every transit agency should perform an assessment to determine agency-specific risks, threats and vulnerabilities to their mail and package system. See APTA SS-SIS-S-017-21, “Security Risk Assessment Methodology for Public Transit,” for more information about conducting risk assessments in transit environments.

3. Planning considerations

Transit agencies should develop policies and procedures to address the safe handling and processing of mail and packages. Policies and procedures should also address how transit agencies will prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to and recover from potential mail and package threats. Planning considerations include the following:

- Identifying roles and responsibilities for personnel involved in mail and package handling and processing.
- Creating communications protocols, including internal and external notification, emergency contact numbers, and signage and alerts.
- Developing mail and package acceptance and distribution procedures.
- Addressing the physical layout of the mail handling facility, promoting visibility and reduction of blind spots, and assessing the impact of colocated mail facilities.
- Securing access control to the mail handling facility.
- Understanding characteristics of suspicious mail and packages, and confirming responsible personnel’s ability to identify suspicious mail or packages and complete related training.
- Providing personal protective equipment to staff.
- Incorporating intelligence and information-sharing resources and partners, including state and local fusion centers, National Threat Advisory System (NTAS), Transportation Security Administration (TSA), Critical Infrastructure Security and Resilience Agency (CISA), and Public Transportation Information Sharing and Analysis Center (PT-ISAC).

Mail and package handling plans should align with other agency safety and security policies and procedures, including the following:

- bomb threat and suspicious item procedures (see APTA SS-SRM-RP-007-12, “Recognizing and Responding to Unattended Packages, Objects and Baggage”)
- facility evacuation procedures
- Continuity of Operations Plans (see APTA SS-SEM-S-001-08, “Continuity of Operations Plan for Transit Agencies”)
- security measures for elevated threats (see APTA SS-ISS-RP-007-24, “Security Measures for Elevated Threats”)

See APTA SS-SIS-RP-010-13, “Security Program Considerations for Public Transit,” for additional security planning considerations.

4. Training

Transit agencies should confirm that all relevant staff receive training to safely perform mail and package handling processing responsibilities. Recommended training includes but is not limited to the following:

- identification of suspicious mail and packages
- selection and use of PPE
- response protocols for suspected CBRNE material, including immediate staff actions should potential exposure occur

Transit agencies should provide initial and refresher training. Transit agencies can consult certified protection professionals and contact the U.S. Postal Service to provide expert guidance and resources. Transit agencies may also contact the FBI, CISA, ATF, and local law enforcement and fire authorities for support.

5. Exercises

Transit agencies should periodically conduct exercises to evaluate mail and package handling procedures. Exercises should cover internal and external response procedures and include personnel responsible for receiving, opening and delivering mail or packages. While transit agencies may seek to deploy a notional suspicious item or package into the mail system, they should carefully control and coordinate exercise deployments to ensure that exercise activities do not trigger real-world response operations. See APTA SS-SEM-S-004-09, “Transit Exercises,” for more information on conducting transit exercises.

Related APTA standards

APTA SS-SEM-S-001-08, “Continuity of Operations Plan for Transit Agencies”

APTA SS-SEM-S-004-09, “Transit Exercises”

APTA SS-ISS-RP-007-24, “Security Measures for Elevated Threats”

APTA SS-SRM-RP-007-12, “Recognizing and Responding to Unattended Packages, Objects and Baggage”

APTA SS-SIS-RP-010-13, “Security Program Considerations for Public Transit”

APTA SS-SIS-S-017-21, “Security Risk Assessment Methodology for Public Transit”

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Abbreviations and acronyms

CBRNE	chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, explosive
COOP	Continuity of Operations Plan
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
NTAS	National Terrorism Advisory System
PPE	personal protective equipment
USPS	U.S. Postal Service

Document history

Document Version	Working Group Vote	Public Comment/ Technical Oversight	CEO Approval	Policy & Planning Approval	Publish Date
First published	—	—	—	—	Dec. 31, 2009
First revision	July 19, 2019	Sept. 13, 2019	Dec. 3, 2019	Jan. 3, 2020	Feb. 21, 2020
Second revision	Feb. 26, 2026	May 2, 2026	May 24, 2026	July 29, 2026	July 31, 2026