



APTA SS-SRM-RP-007-12, Rev. 2

First Published: December 1, 2012

First Revision: May 10, 2023

Second Revision: May 12, 2026

**Security and Emergency Management
Working Group**

Recognizing and Responding to Unattended and Suspicious 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 passengers and fellow employees. This recommended practice provides broad guidelines for recognizing and responding to unattended and suspicious packages, objects and baggage within the transit system.



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-SRM-RP-007-12, Rev. 1, which has been revised. Below is a summary of changes from the previous document version:

- Expanded title and contents by adding "suspicious" throughout
- Replaced "Not on my Watch" campaign with "First Observer Plus"
- Differentiated unattended and suspicious items
- Updated technical guidance related to communication near suspected devices
- Modernized assorted contents and terminology
- Added figure
- Incorporated new references



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Introduction

This introduction is not part of APTA SS-SRM-RP-007-12, “Recognizing and Responding to Unattended and Suspicious Packages, Objects and Baggage.”

APTA recommends the use of this document by:

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



Scope and purpose

This recommended practice is applicable to all transit agencies, regardless of size or mode. It is not intended to supersede any federal, state or local laws or regulatory requirements. This document offers a baseline set of recommendations to assist transit agencies in their recognition of and response to unattended and suspicious items. This document complements APTA SS-SRM-RP-009-09, “Identifying Suspicious Behavior in Mass Transit,” which was updated in 2022. The purpose of this document is to provide transit agencies with broad guidelines for evolving their 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 and suspicious items. It includes material to help transit agencies differentiate attended and suspicious packages.

Recognizing and Responding to Unattended and Suspicious Packages, Objects and Baggage

1. Overview

This recommended practice provides broad guidelines for recognizing and responding to unattended and suspicious 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 an agency’s operations and services and play a vital role in the safety and security of passengers and fellow employees. Moreover, programs such as the “See Something, Say Something” and TSA “First Observer Plus™” security awareness campaigns educate employees and passengers on how to recognize and respond to unattended and suspicious items.

This recommended practice includes criteria for recognizing characteristics of unattended items and determining if unattended items are suspicious. 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 identified security goals, operations and potential threats. 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 and suspicious items are provided in this document. TSA periodically develops awareness materials and images for internal transit agency and public release.

Security awareness training and exercises should include guidance on recognizing and responding to unattended and suspicious items. See APTA SS-SRM-RP-005-12, “Security Awareness Training for Transit Employees,” and APTA SS-SEM-S-004-09, “Transit Exercises,” for more information.

2.1 General guidelines for determining when unattended items are suspicious

All transit agency employees play a vital role in ensuring the safety and security of every person within the transit system. Employees must remain alert for unattended items located within the transit system. Suspicion

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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.

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

- any unattended item inconsistent 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 or appears purposely concealed
- 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 also include but is not limited to an incident in which an employee observes indicators of a potential chemical weapons attack, such as two or more people 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 or unattended items:

- Do not touch an item that has been deemed suspicious.
- Limit radio and cell phone use if an explosive device is suspected, especially in the immediate vicinity of a suspected device. Historically, security professionals recommended no calls or radio transmissions within 300 ft from a suspected device and advised employees and customers to use a landline, such as a blue light, emergency call box or in-house phone, instead of wireless communication equipment. The primary rationale for this recommendation is the risk that stray radio frequency energy could unintentionally trigger a device. However, technological advancements; modern adversary tactics, techniques and procedures; and the importance of immediate communications are driving some security professionals to reconsider this advice. Still, radios have a higher potential to unintentionally trigger a device compared with cell phones, so radio transmissions should occur only away from a suspected device. If no other form of communication is available and moving to recommended stand-off distances is not possible (e.g., due to evacuation efforts), it is recommended to move to the closest point of cover or behind a building corner prior to radio transmission. Transit agencies should consult with agency staff and law enforcement partners to determine the most suitable guideline for their agency.
- Adhere to the Department of Homeland Security and Federal Bureau of Investigation guidance for stand-off distances (see **Figure 1**).
- 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, time of detection, location of the object, suspicious nature of the object and, if applicable, any people associated with the object.

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Also consider the following steps:

- Leave the area as quickly as possible, and do not attempt to lend assistance if doing so delays your own escape. Do not reenter the area once you have evacuated everyone.
- Advise employees or customers not to enter the affected area.
- Don personal protective equipment (if provided by the agency).
- Await direction from a supervisor, control center, police or emergency responders.

FIGURE 1

CISA Bomb Threat Stand-Off Chart

Threat Description	Explosives Capacity	Mandatory Evacuation Distance	Shelter-in-Place Zone	Preferred Evacuation Distance
Pipe Bomb	5 lbs	70 ft	71-1199 ft	+1200 ft
Suicide Bomber	20 lbs	110 ft	111-1699 ft	+1700 ft
Briefcase/Suitcase	50 lbs	150 ft	151-1849 ft	+1850 ft
Car	500 lbs	320 ft	321-1899 ft	+1900 ft
SUV/Van	1,000 lbs	400 ft	401-2399 ft	+2400 ft
Small Delivery Truck	4,000 lbs	640 ft	641-3799 ft	+3800 ft
Container/Water Truck	10,000 lbs	860 ft	861-5099 ft	+5100 ft
Semi-Trailer	60,000 lbs	1570 ft	1571-9299 ft	+9300 ft

DEFEND TODAY, SECURE TOMORROW

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)—also called the 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 and stations)
- a complete description of unattended package(s) and any related suspicious activity

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- 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 §1570.203 (2022).

3. Suspicious item training and information resources

Transit agencies have access to multiple resources from various organizations. The following resources have been developed by the DHS Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), FBI, TSA and the National Transit Institute (NTI) in conjunction with the FTA.

3.1 CISA resources

The Department of Homeland Security, working in partnership with other agencies, offers a wide range of resources throughout its various components. For example, the CISA Office for Bombing Prevention (OBP) leads DHS efforts to implement the National Policy for Countering Improvised Explosive Devices (National Counter-IED policy) and enhance the nation’s ability to prevent, protect against, respond to and mitigate the use of explosives against critical infrastructure; the private sector; and federal, state, local, tribal and territorial entities. OBP provides several resources, such as bomb checklists and identifiers for unattended packages.

Figure 2 shows CISA’s “What to Do: Suspicious or Unattended Item” video training (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r13iJlFTFC0>), and **Figure 3** shows DHS’s “Suspicious or Unattended?” security poster.

FIGURE 2
DHS CISA Video Training

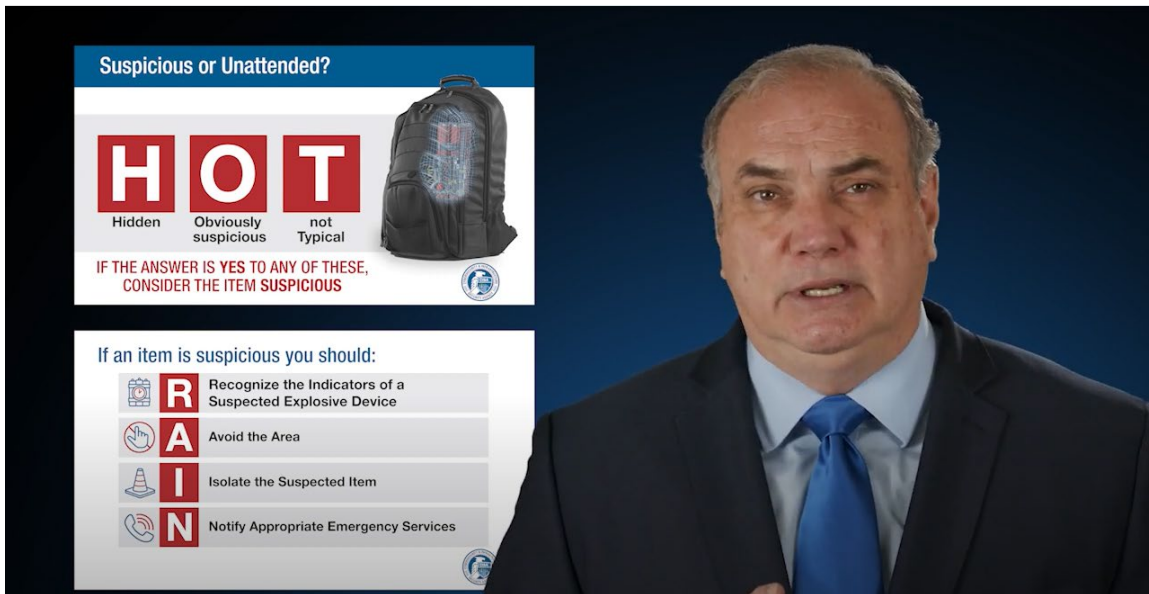


FIGURE 3
DHS Poster

Suspicious or Unattended?
OFFICE FOR BOMBING PREVENTION

Criminals or terrorists sometimes conceal improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in backpacks, suitcases, or common items.
Use this process to safely determine if an item is a serious threat or just unattended.

Is it HOT?

Hidden	Obviously suspicious	not Typical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Placed out of sight Appears purposely concealed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unexplainable wires or electronics Bomb-like components 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Out of place for the location Potentially related to a threat

Use R.A.I.N. **YES** (Suspicious) | **NO** (Unattended)

- Treat with caution
- Try to determine the owner
- Report to an authority

If an item is suspicious you should:

- R** **Recognize the Indicators of a Suspected Explosive Device**
Indicators can be related to the characteristics, events, location, or time, including whether the item is Hidden, Obviously suspicious, or not Typical (HOT).
- A** **Avoid the Area**
Don't touch the suspected item. Instead, immediately move and direct others to move away immediately.
- I** **Isolate the Suspected Item**
Establish a perimeter to secure the area and continue to direct people away. Use frontal and overhead cover and if available wear personal protective equipment.
- N** **Notify Appropriate Emergency Services**
Describe the **S**uspicious items and persons, the person's **A**ctions, the **L**ocation of the item, the **T**ime of placement and discovery, and **Y**our actions to mitigate risk (SALTY).

If you see something, say something®

REPORT SUSPICIOUS ITEMS
Contact **local law enforcement** or **9-1-1** in case of emergency

DEFEND TODAY, SECURE TOMORROW

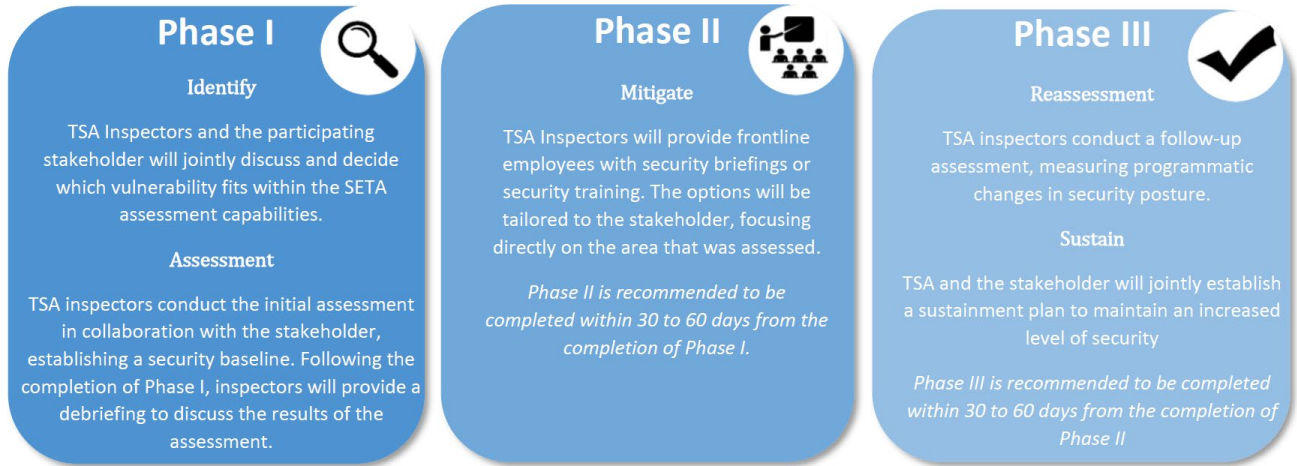
® "See Something, Say Something" used with permission of the US Administration Transportation Authority.

3.2 TSA resources

TSA offers several different resources and trainings related to unattended baggage. For example, the TSA Security Enhancement Through Assessment (SETA) program (see Figure 4) is a no-cost, collaborative, voluntary program designed to evaluate and improve a surface transportation stakeholder’s vehicle inspection procedures. A tactical level assessment, SETA consists of covertly placing unattended bags on multiple vehicles simultaneously to simulate a coordinated terrorist attack. TSA may also be able to provide transit agencies training on unattended baggage via local surface transportation security inspectors and transportation security specialists for explosives (TSSEs).

Recognizing and Responding to Unattended and Suspicious Packages, Objects and Baggage

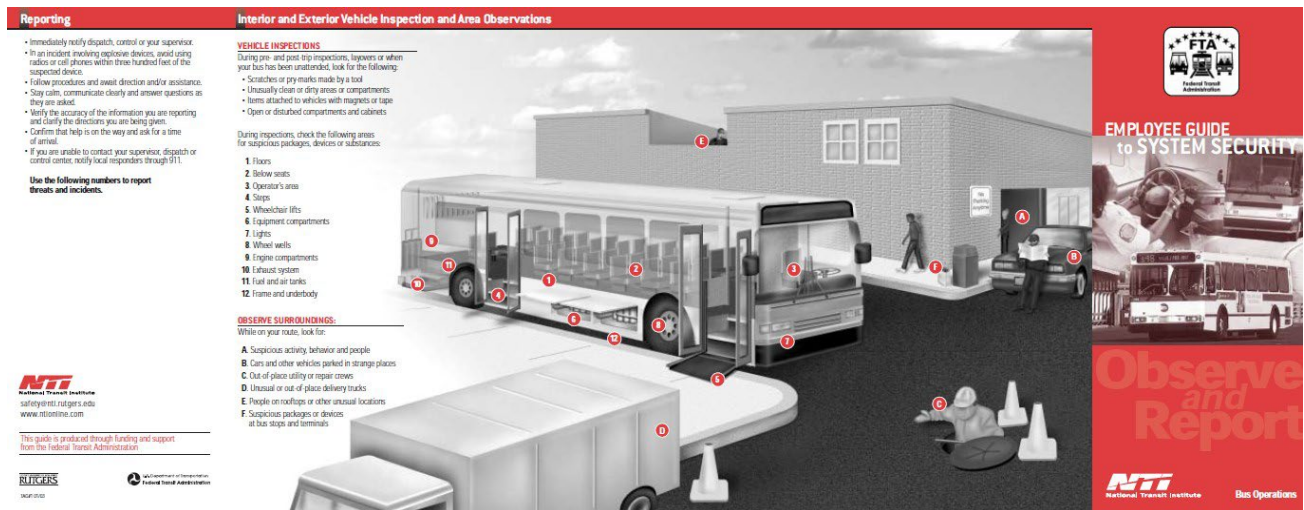
FIGURE 4
SETA “Multiphase Approach” Training



3.3 NTI resources

NTI published the pocket guides shown in Figure 5, Figure 6, Figure 7 and Figure 8 to increase awareness.

FIGURE 5
NTI’s “Bus Operations” Pocket Guide



Recognizing and Responding to Unattended and Suspicious Packages, Objects and Baggage

FIGURE 6

NTI's "Commuter Bus and Terminal" Pocket Guide

Reporting

- Immediately notify dispatch, control or your supervisor.
- In an incident involving explosive devices, avoid using radios or cell phones within three hundred feet of the suspected device.
- Follow procedures and await direction and/or assistance.
- Stay calm, communicate clearly and answer questions as they are asked.
- Verify the accuracy of the information you are reporting and clarify the directions you are being given.
- Confirm that help is on the way and ask for a time of arrival.
- If you are unable to contact your supervisor, dispatch or control center, notify local responders through 911.

Use the following numbers to report threats and incidents.

Security Sweeps

Continually monitoring operations and areas will help reduce the risk of security threats and incidents. During pre and post trip inspections, operators or when your bus has been unattended, look for the following signs of vehicle tampering:

- Scratches or pry marks made by a tool
- Unusually clean or dirty areas or compartments
- Items attached to vehicle with magnets or tape
- Open or disabled compartments and cabinets


Be alert for suspicious activity, packages, devices, substances and conditions along the route, on the bus and in terminals or facilities.

BUSES


- Floors
- Below seats
- Operator's area
- Steps
- Restrooms
- Luggage compartments
- Lights
- Wheel wells
- Engine compartments
- Fuel tank system
- Fuel tanks
- Frame and underbody

TERMINALS


- Benches and seats
- Trash receptacles
- Phone stations
- Vending machines
- Ticket windows
- TVM machines
- Stairways
- Storage lockers
- Restrooms
- Food and convenience vendors
- Bus shelters and platforms



EMPLOYEE GUIDE to SYSTEM SECURITY



Observe and Report



Commuter Bus & Terminal

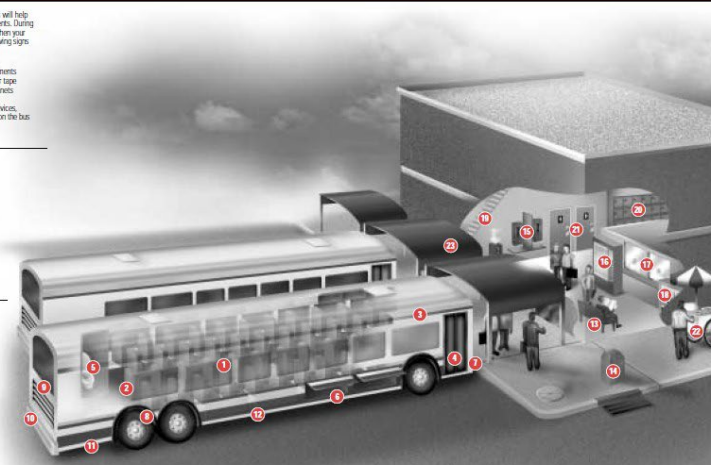


FIGURE 7

NTI's "Bus Maintenance" Pocket Guide

Reporting

- Immediately notify your supervisor.
- In an incident involving explosive devices, avoid using radios or cell phones within three hundred feet of the suspected device.
- Follow procedures and await direction and/or assistance.
- Stay calm, communicate clearly and answer questions as they are asked.
- Verify the accuracy of the information you are reporting and clarify the directions you are being given.
- Confirm that help is on the way and ask for a time of arrival.
- If you are unable to contact your supervisor, notify local responders through 911.

Use the following numbers to report threats and incidents.

Security Sweeps

When servicing or releasing vehicles look for suspicious packages, devices, wires, substances and signs of tampering. In particular, check the engine compartment for foreign objects or a false compartment in the air filter area and additional wires from the battery. Inspect the fuel and air tanks for inconsistent and missing connections.

Signs of vehicle tampering include:

- Scratches or marks made by tools
- Unusually clean or dirty compartments
- Items attached to vehicles or objects with magnets or duct tape
- Open or disabled compartments and cabinets

Continuously check the following areas for suspicious activity, packages, devices, and substances:

BUS INTERIOR

- Floors
- Above, on and below seats
- Operator's area
- Steps
- Wheelchair lift/ramp
- Interior compartments


BUS EXTERIOR

- Access panels
- Stair rack
- Wheel wells
- Engine compartment
- Bus frame and underbody
- Subvent system
- Fuel tanks
- Roof-top equipment

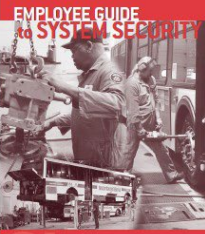
MAINTENANCE SHOP

- Out of place items
- Parts inventory


On commuter buses, also check interior and exterior luggage compartments and lavatories.



EMPLOYEE GUIDE to SYSTEM SECURITY



Observe and Report



Bus Maintenance

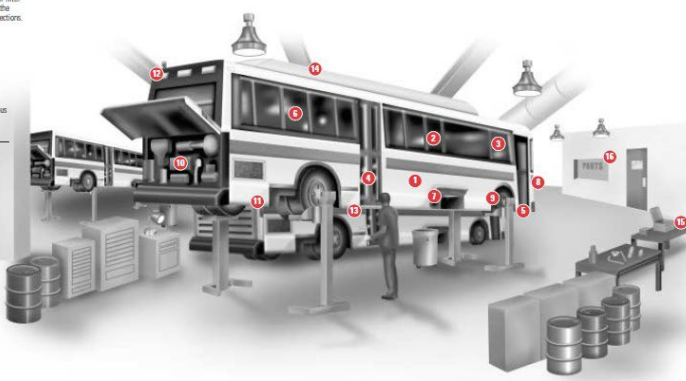


FIGURE 8
NTI's "Light Rail" Pocket Guide

Reporting

- Immediately notify dispatch, control or your supervisor
- In an incident involving explosive devices, avoid using radios or cell phones within three hundred feet of the suspected device.
- Follow procedures and await direction and/or assistance.
- Stay calm, communicate clearly and answer questions as they are asked.
- Verify the accuracy of the information you are reporting and clarify the directions you are being given.
- Confirm that help is on the way and ask for a time of arrival.
- If you are unable to contact your supervisor, dispatch or control center, notify local responders through 911.

Use the following numbers to report threats and incidents.

Security Sweeps

Be alert for suspicious activity, packages, devices, substances and conditions along the right-of-way, in stations, yards and facilities, and on the trains. Your efforts in continuously monitoring operations and areas will help reduce the risk of security threats and incidents.

Continuously check the following areas for suspicious activity, packages, devices, and substances:

STATIONS


1. Fare vending machines
2. Trash containers
3. Benches
4. Lights and signs on wall

RIGHT-OF-WAY

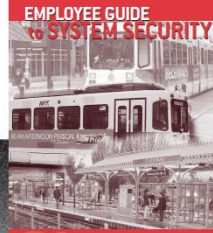
5. Between and under rails and switches
6. Landscaping and fences
7. Utility zones
8. Communication and utility cabinets
9. Payphones

LIGHT RAIL VEHICLES


10. Floors and seats
11. Operator's cab
12. Interior compartments and lights
13. Articulation joint, street and buffer
14. Undercarriage equipment (brake system, tracks, cabs)
15. Space between cars
16. Couplers
17. Pantograph and rooftop equipment
18. Slit panels
19. Materials stored along right-of-way




EMPLOYEE GUIDE to SYSTEM SECURITY



Observe and Report





Light Rail



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This guide is produced through funding and support from the Federal Transit Administration

Related APTA standards

APTA SS-SRM-RP-005-12, “Security Awareness Training for Transit Employees”

APTA SS-SRM-RP-009-09, “Identifying Suspicious Behavior in Mass Transit”

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

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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.

suspicious item: An unattended package, object or piece of baggage that raises feelings of wariness or distrust because it is out of the ordinary in appearance 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. Whether the size of an envelope or a suitcase, a suspicious item may conceal a device capable of injuring people or disrupting service.

Abbreviations and acronyms

CISA	Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
HOT	Hidden, Obviously suspicious, and not Typical
NTI	National Transit Institute
SETA	Security Enhancement Through Assessment
TSA	Transportation Security Administration
TSOC	Transportation Security Operations Center
TSSE	transportation security specialist for explosives

Document history

Document Version	Working Group Vote	Public Comment/ Technical Oversight	CEO Approval	Policy & Planning Approval	Publish Date
First published	—	—	—	—	Dec. 1, 2012
First revision	July 29, 2022	Dec. 1, 2022	March 6, 2023	March 31, 2023	May 10, 2023
Second revision	Dec. 1, 2025	January 29, 2026	February 28, 2026	April 10, 2026	May 12, 2026