



**APTA SS-SRM-RP-007-12**

Approved December 2012

APTA Security Risk Management  
Workgroup

# 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.

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 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.

© 2012 American Public Transportation Association. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form, in an electronic retrieval system or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the American Public Transportation Association.



## Participants

The American Public Transportation Association greatly appreciates the contributions of **Sheila Hockel** and **Douglas Hamilton**, who provided the primary effort in writing this *Recommended Practice*.

At the time this Recommended Practice was completed, the working group included the following members:

**Michael Birch**, *Chair*  
**Mark Uccardi**, *Vice Chair*

Sonja Armstrong  
 Neil Crosier  
 Cathryn Flandina  
 Richard Gerhart  
 Renee Haider  
 Sheila Hockel  
 Jon Mann  
 Nopadon McKee  
 Robert Melan  
 Mark Norton  
 John Plante  
 James Taylor  
 Ben Titus  
 Peter Totten  
 Morvarid Zolghadr

**Project team**  
 Kevin Dow  
*American Public Transportation Association*

# Contents

<b>1. Overview</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Guidelines on unattended items</b> .....	<b>1</b>
2.1 General guidelines for determining which items are suspicious..	1
2.2 Responding to suspicious items.....	2
2.3 Contacting the TSOC – Freedom Center.....	4
<b>3. Examples of suspicious item brochures</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Definitions</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Abbreviations and acronyms</b> .....	<b>8</b>

# 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.

**FIGURE 1 – Bomb Threat Stand-Off Chart**

<b>Threat Description - Improvised Explosive Device (IED)</b>	<b>Explosives Capacity<sup>1</sup> (TNT Equivalent)</b>	<b>Building Evacuation Distance<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Outdoor Evacuation Distance<sup>3</sup></b>
Pipe Bomb	5 LBS	70 FT	1200 FT
Suicide Bomber	20 LBS	110 FT	1700 FT
Briefcase/Suitcase	50 LBS	150 FT	1850 FT
Car	500 LBS	320 FT	1500 FT
SUV/Van	1,000 LBS	400 FT	2400 FT
Small Moving Van/ Delivery Truck	4,000 LBS	640 FT	3800 FT
Moving Van/ Water Truck	10,000 LBS	860 FT	5100 FT
Semi-Trailer	60,000 LBS	1570 FT	9300 FT

*Courtesy [www.fbiic.gov/public/2009/june/DHS-BombThreatChart-6-5-09.pdf](http://www.fbiic.gov/public/2009/june/DHS-BombThreatChart-6-5-09.pdf)*

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 **H**idden. *Placed in an area not easily observed but high traffic or critical. Is there VIP/media activity?*
- The package is **O**bviously suspicious. *Are wires showing , is it smoking , have fumes / odors , leaking or ticking?*
- The package is not in a **T**ypical 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

**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.**

**Interior and Exterior Vehicle Inspection and Area Observations**

**VEHICLE INSPECTIONS**  
During pre- and post-trip inspections, layovers or when your bus has been unattended, look for the following:


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

During inspections, check the following areas for suspicious packages, devices or substances:

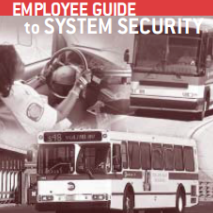
- Floors
- Below seats
- Operator's area
- Steps
- Wheelchair lifts
- Equipment compartments
- Lights
- Wheel wells
- Engine compartments
- Exhaust system
- Fuel and air tanks
- Frame and underbody

**OBSERVE SURROUNDINGS:**  
While on your route, look for:


- Suspicious activity, behavior and people
- Cars and other vehicles parked in strange places
- Out of place utility or repair crews
- Unusual or out-of-place delivery trucks
- People on hallways or other unusual locations
- Suspicious packages or devices at bus stops and terminals



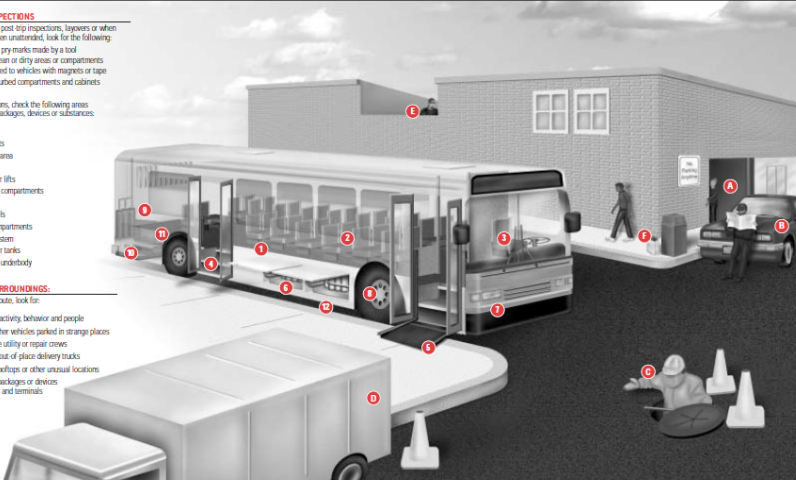
**EMPLOYEE GUIDE to SYSTEM SECURITY**



**Observe and Report**



Bus Operations



**FIGURE 4**  
NTI's "Commuter Bus & 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, layovers 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 disturbed 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**

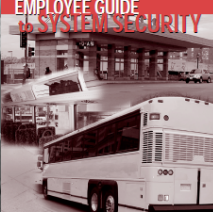
- Floors
- Below seats
- Operator's area
- Steps
- Restrooms
- Luggage compartments
- Lights
- Wheel wells
- Engine compartments
- Exhaust system
- Fuel tanks
- Frame and underbody

**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



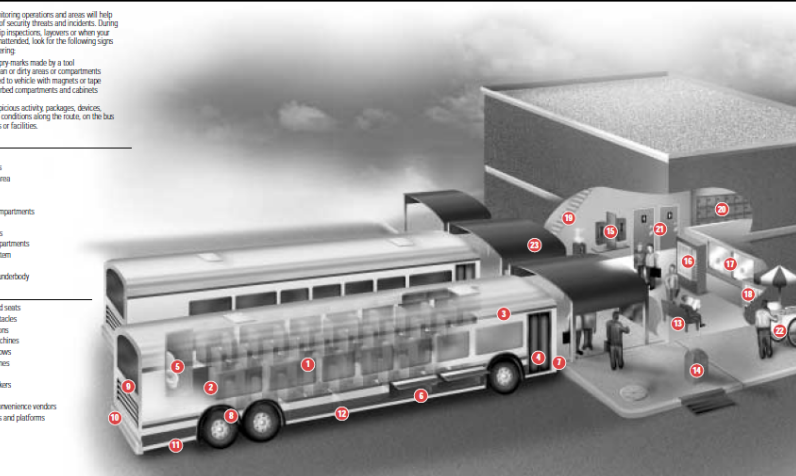
**EMPLOYEE GUIDE to SYSTEM SECURITY**



**Observe and Report**



Commuter Bus & Terminal





**FIGURE 5**  
NTI's "Bus Maintenance" Pocket Guide

Reporting	Security Sweeps		EMPLOYEE GUIDE to SYSTEM SECURITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immediately notify your supervisor.</li> <li>• In an incident involving explosive devices, avoid using radios or cell phones within three hundred feet of the suspected device.</li> <li>• Follow procedures and await direction and/or assistance.</li> <li>• Stay calm, communicate clearly and answer questions as they are asked.</li> <li>• Verify the accuracy of the information you are reporting and notify the dispatchers you are being paged.</li> <li>• Confirm that help is on the way and ask for a time of arrival.</li> <li>• If you are unable to contact your supervisor, notify local responders through 911.</li> </ul> <p><b>Use the following numbers to report threats and incidents.</b></p>    <p style="font-size: small;">This guide is produced through funding and support from the Federal Transit Administration</p>   	<p>When receiving 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 oil tanks for improper and missing connections.</p> <p>Signs of vehicle tampering include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scratches or marks made by tools</li> <li>• Unusually clean or dirty compartments</li> <li>• Items attached to vehicles or objects with magnets or duct tape</li> <li>• Open or disturbed compartments and cabinets</li> </ul> <p>Continuously check the following areas for suspicious activity, packages, devices, and substances:</p> <p><b>BUS INTERIOR</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Floors</li> <li>2. Above, on and below seats</li> <li>3. Operator's area</li> <li>4. Steps</li> <li>5. Wheelchair lift/ramp</li> <li>6. Interior compartments</li> </ol> <p><b>BUS EXTERIOR</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Access panels</li> <li>8. Bike rack</li> <li>9. Wheel wells</li> <li>10. Engine compartment</li> <li>11. Bus frame and underbody</li> <li>12. Exhaust system</li> <li>13. Fuel tanks</li> <li>14. Hood/hood equipment</li> </ol> <p><b>MAINTENANCE SHOP</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15. Out of place items</li> <li>16. Parts inventory</li> </ol> <p>On commuter buses, also check interior and exterior luggage compartments and lavatories.</p>		  

## 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, “Immediate Actions for Transit Agencies,” April 2004. <http://transit-safety.volpe.dot.gov/security/securityinitiatives/ImmediateActions/HTML/IAs.html>

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.

National Transit Institute/Federal Transit Administration, “The Mark” training video, 2007. <http://transit-safety.volpe.dot.gov/security/TrainingTools/default.asp>.

“Reporting Significant Security Concerns,” 49 CFR § 1580.203 (2010).

## 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

<b>APTA</b>	American Public Transportation Association
<b>ATU</b>	Amalgamated Transit Union
<b>DHS</b>	Department of Homeland Security
<b>FTA</b>	Federal Transit Administration
<b>HOT</b>	Hidden, Obviously suspicious and not Typical
<b>NTI</b>	National Transit Institute
<b>TARR</b>	Terrorist Activity Recognition and Reaction
<b>TSA</b>	Transportation Security Administration