

MAIL HANDLING CAUTIONS

Alberta Government Information

Many people have questions about how mailrooms and offices should handle mail that may contain a written threat of chemical or biological material inside, or mail that may contain some form of powder.

Following are common sense steps to take in workplaces. The risk of contracting any disease from an envelope is extremely low. General awareness of one's surroundings and suspicious mail is appropriate.

General precautions for those who handle large volumes of mail:

- Wash your hands with warm soap and water before and after handling the mail.
- Do not eat, drink or smoke around mail.
- If you have open cuts or skin lesions on your hands, disposable latex gloves may be appropriate.
- Surgical masks, eye protection or gowns are NOT necessary or recommended.

If a letter is received that contains powder or contains a written threat:

1. Do not shake or empty the envelope.
2. Isolate the specific area of the workplace so that no one disturbs the item.
3. Evacuation of the entire workplace is NOT necessary at this point.
4. Have someone call 911 and tell them what you received, and what you have done with it. Indicate whether the envelope contains any visible powder or if powder was released.
5. Wash your hands with warm water and soap for one minute.
6. Do not allow anyone to leave the office that might have touched the envelope.
7. When emergency responders arrive, they will provide further instructions on what to do.

Important:

- Do not panic.
- Do not walk around with the letter or shake it.
- Do not merely discard the letter.

What constitutes a suspicious parcel?

Some typical characteristics which ought to trigger suspicion, include parcels that:

- are unexpected or from someone unfamiliar to you;
- are addressed to someone no longer with your organization or are otherwise outdated;
- have no return address, or have one that can't be verified as legitimate;
- are of unusual weight, given their size, or are lopsided or oddly shaped. are marked with restrictive endorsements, such as "Personal" or "Confidential";
- have protruding wires, strange odors or stains;
- show a city or province in the postmark that doesn't match the return address;
- have excess masking tape or string; or
- are addressed to a working title, but do not include a name.

What should I do if I've received a suspicious parcel in the mail?

- Do not try to open the parcel!
- Isolate the parcel.
- Evacuate the immediate area.
- Call your supervisor to report that you've received a parcel in the mail that may contain biological or chemical substances.