

5.5.12 Safe Mail Handling

(a) Overview

A wide range of potential threats can be introduced in the workplace by way of incoming mail. Threats that involve chemical and biological substances and contraband are both dangerous and disruptive. All staff who handle mail shall be able to identify these threats and eliminate or mitigate the risk they pose to the workplace, staff, and daily operations.

(b) Responsibility

All staff who handle incoming mail are responsible for following safe mail handling procedures as outlined within this procedure.

(c) Procedure

(1) Precautions

Staff shall always be aware of surroundings and suspicious mail. The following steps and general precautions for handling incoming mail shall be taken.

(A) Wash hands with soap and warm water before and after handling mail.

(B) Inspect and open received mail in an isolated location.

(C) Do not eat, drink, or smoke around mail.

(D) Disposable plastic or rubber gloves may be appropriate if a staff has open cuts or skin lesions on hands. To safely remove gloves:

1. Grasp the outside of one glove at the wrist.

2. Peel the glove away from your body, pulling it inside out.

3. Hold the glove you just removed in your gloved hand.

4. Peel off the second glove by putting your fingers inside the glove at the top of your wrist.

5. Turn the second glove inside out while pulling it away from your body, leaving the first glove inside the second.

6. Pay close attention that you do not touch the exterior of the glove. The idea is to flip the gloves inside-out so that you will not have to touch the contaminated exterior.

7. Dispose of the gloves safely. Do not reuse the gloves.

8. Clean your hands immediately after removing gloves.

(2) Initial Inspection and Opening of Mail

(A) Visibly and physically inspect each item for key characteristics of suspicious or potentially dangerous mail including, but not limited to:

1. Excessive packaging.

2. Oily stains, discolorations, or odors.

3. No return address.

4. Excessive weight.

5. Uneven or lopsided packaging.

6. Excessive security material e.g. string, tape, etc.

7. Postmark from a city or state that does not match the return address.

8. Powdery substance felt through or left on the envelope or package.

(B) If no threats are discovered, sort and deliver the envelope or package.

(3) Handling of Suspicious or Potentially Dangerous Mail

(A) Do not open the envelope or package (or open any further).

(B) Do not shake the envelope or package, show it to others, or empty its contents.

(C) Leave the envelope or package where it is or gently place it on the nearest flat surface.

(D) If possible, gently cover the items (e.g., use a trash can, article of clothing).

(E) Shut off any fans or equipment in the area that may circulate the material.

(F) Alert others nearby to relocate to an area away from the site of the suspicious item.

(G) Take essential belongings (e.g., cell phones, keys, purse) in case returning to the office is delayed.

(H) Leave and close the door to the space containing the suspicious envelope or package, cover the threshold area under the door with a towel or a coat if possible, and section off the area to keep others away.

(I) To prevent spreading any powder or hazardous substance to the face, wash hands thoroughly with soap and water.

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(J) Suspicious mail may lead to an investigation. Staff who process and encounter suspicious mail shall not destroy potential evidence by vacuuming powder, disposing of dangerous packages, or similar activities.

(4) Incident Reporting

(A) California Correctional Health Care Services staff shall notify appropriate supervisory staff if suspicious or potentially dangerous mail is discovered and provide all documentation of the incident including, but not limited to:

1. The addressee's name or location.
2. Description of the suspected dangerous envelope or package.
3. The time of the discovery.
4. Description of how the discovery was made.
5. Where the secured dangerous envelope or package is located.

(B) The Operations Support Manager or Business Services Officer shall notify the Associate Director and Staff Services Manager IIs for incidents occurring in the Business Operations mail room.

(C) In emergency situations, any staff member shall call first responders or 9-1-1 and report as much detailed information that is available.

(D) Staff shall not alert the media about the situation.

Revision History

Effective: 05/2020