PROPOSED INCIDENT PROCEDURES FOR POWDERS / BIOLOGICAL AGENTS

The purpose of these guidelines are to help you set out procedures for handling powder / biological packages.

Terrorist or criminal incidents of this nature are extremely rare. However, if there is a concern that a suspect biological/chemical package has been received, sensible steps can be taken to minimise the risk of exposure and the possibility of harm. The overall message is to remain calm

A SUSPICIOUS UNOPENED LETTER OR PACKAGE MARKED WITH A THREATENING MESSAGE SUCH AS "ANTHRAX" OR SIMILAR IN DESCRIPTION TO PREVIOUS PACKAGES:

1. Do not shake or empty the contents of a suspicious envelope or package.

2. PLACE the envelope or package in a plastic bag (preferably sealable) or some other type of Hazmat container to prevent leakage of contents. Gloves and dust masks should be worn for this.

3. If you do not have a container, then COVER the envelope or package with anything (e.g. clothing, paper, waste bin etc) and do not remove the cover.

4. IMMEDIATELY NOTIFY SECURITY / MANAGER BY TELEPHONE, they will notify the Emergency Services and maintenance team who will come to your assistance.

5. Outgoing air conditioning is to be isolated

6. Then LEAVE the room and CLOSE the door, or cordon off the area to prevent others from entering (i.e. keep others away until security arrives to take over the situation).

7. Security will then isolate the area and floor by stationing officers in the lift lobbies and the fire escape stairs; this may need the assistance of fire marshals to stop the people accessing the floor.

8. Security will then take you to a designated wash down area on your floor so that you can wash your hands with soap and water to prevent spreading of any powder to your face.

9. You should remain there until help arrives to take you to another location.

10. Security will announce over the public address system or equivalent that "A suspicious package has been found in the building and the area affected has been evacuated. Unless specifically instructed to move by a security officer you should remain at your desk and not move about the building until further notice."

11. Finally…..
    LIST all people who were in the room or area where this suspicious letter or package was recognised. Give the list to both the local public health authorities and law enforcement officials for follow-up investigations and advice.

ENVELOPE WITH POWDER AND/OR POWDER SPILLS OUT ONTO SURFACE:

1. DO NOT try to CLEAN UP the powder, COVER the spilled contents immediately with anything (e.g. clothing, paper, bin). PLACE the envelope or package in a plastic bag (preferably sealable) or some other type of Hazmat container to prevent leakage of contents (gloves and face masks to be worn)

2. IMMEDIATELY NOTIFY SECURITY / MANAGERBY TELEPHONE they will notify the Emergency Services and the maintenance team who will come to your assistance.

3. Close Windows and Doors

4. All air conditioning is to be isolated.

5. Then LEAVE the room and CLOSE the door, or cordon off the area to prevent others from entering (i.e. keep others away until security arrive to take over the situation.

6. Security will then isolate the area and floor by stationing officers in the lift lobbies and the fire escape stairs. This may need the assistance of fire marshals to stop people accessing the floor.

7. You should move immediately to a pre-designated room nearby (next door or opposite) in which there should be washing facilities – if none are available, a bucket or bowl with bottles of water, Hibbiscrub and paper towel is recommended.

8. You should remain there until security arrives to take you to another location.

9. Security will announce over the public address system or equivalent that “A suspicious package has been found in the building and the area affected has been evacuated. Unless specifically instructed to move by a security officer you should remain at your desk and not move about the building until further notice.”

10. If possible, list all people who were in the room or area, especially those who had contact with the powder. Give this list to both the local public health authorities so that proper instructions can be given for medical follow-up, and to enforcement officials for further investigation.

SOME SIGNS THAT CAN TRIGGER A SUSPICION

- Discolouration, crystals or surface, strange odours or oily stains
- Envelope with powder or powder-like residue
- Excessive tape or string
- Unusual size or weight given size
- Lopsided or oddly-shaped envelope
- Postmark that does not match return address
- Restrictive endorsements such as "Personal" or "Confidential"
- Excessive postage
- Handwritten, block-printed or poorly-typed addresses
- Incorrect titles
- Title but no name
- Misspellings of common words
- No return address
- Addressed to individual no longer with organisation

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE AN EMPLOYER, BUILDING / SECURITY MANAGER

Consider what you should be doing now, and what contingency plans you need for handling mail and suspect packages and your response plans in the event of your receiving a suspect letter or package. Ensure that plans are regularly rehearsed.

Health and safety at work legislation, including the Biological Agents Directive, clearly states that when selecting preventative measures to control risks to workers and others, employers must select from a hierarchy of measures. These are set out below.

The first step is to review your current risk assessment and your procedures for handling mail in your organisation or business. In doing so consider the possibility, however small, of your business receiving suspect packages. As part of any contingency planning you will need to have measures in place to quickly trace a suspect letter or parcel back through the mail handling system. This would enable you to identify anyone in the workplace who may have been exposed to a risk to their health and safety so they can be treated quickly.

When performing risk assessments in the workplace and selecting adequate control measures involve employees in the risk assessment process and provide them with relevant information on what the risks are and what steps need to be taken to ensure they are adequately controlled. The hierarchy of control measures you need to consider includes:

- prevention of exposure (eg restricting the numbers of employees handling the mail)
- engineering controls (eg filters on machinery and air extracting systems)
- the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) (eg masks or gloves).
- PPE should only be considered if the risk assessment indicates that it is appropriate after all other controls have been addressed. When considering PPE to control risks it is important that you select the equipment that is suitable for the task being performed as well as for the risk being considered. PPE is only effective if it is used properly, so employees need proper training on good hygiene and the use, storage and disposal of the equipment. Further information

Anthrax

There are three types of anthrax, each with different signs and symptoms. In most cases, symptoms develop within seven days of exposure to the bacteria.

Cutaneous anthrax

This form of anthrax enters your body through a cut or other sore on your skin. It's by far the most common form of the disease. It's also the mildest — with appropriate treatment, cutaneous anthrax is seldom fatal. Signs and symptoms of cutaneous anthrax include: A raised, itchy bump resembling an insect bite that quickly develops into a painless sore with a black centre, Swelling in the sore and nearby lymph glands.

Gastrointestinal anthrax

You contract this form of anthrax by eating undercooked meat from an infected animal. Signs and symptoms include:Nausea,Vomiting, which is often bloody in the later stages of the disease, Loss of appetite, Fever, bloody diarrhoea in the later stages of the disease, Sore throat and difficulty swallowing, Swollen neck

Inhalation (pulmonary) anthrax

Inhalation anthrax develops when you breathe in anthrax spores. It's the most deadly form of the disease, and even with treatment it is often fatal. Initial signs and symptoms of inhalation anthrax include: Flu-like symptoms, such as sore throat, mild fever, fatigue and muscle aches, which may last a few hours or days. Mild chest discomfort as the disease progresses, you may also experience: High fever, trouble breathing, shock, meningitis — a potentially life-threatening inflammation of the brain and spinal cord

Many common illnesses start with symptoms that resemble the flu. Anthrax is rare in the developed world, and the chances that your sore throat and aching muscles are due to anthrax are extremely small.

If you think you may have been exposed — for example, if you work in an environment where anthrax is likely to occur — see a doctor immediately for evaluation and care. If you develop signs and symptoms of the disorder after exposure to animals or animal products in parts of the world where anthrax is common, seek prompt medical attention. Early diagnosis and treatment are crucial.

FACTS ABOUT RICIN

Ricin is a poison found naturally in castor beans. If castor beans are chewed and swallowed, the released ricin can cause injury. Ricin can be made from the waste material left over from processing castor beans. It can be in the form of a powder, a mist, or a pellet, or it can be dissolved in water or weak acid. It is a stable substance under normal conditions, but can be inactivated by heat above 80 degrees centigrade (176 degrees Fahrenheit).

Where ricin is found and how it is used

Castor beans are processed throughout the world to make castor oil. Ricin is part of the waste “mash” produced when castor oil is made.

How you could be exposed to ricin

- It would take a deliberate act to make ricin and use it to poison people. Unintentional exposure to ricin is highly unlikely, except through the ingestion of castor beans.

- If made into a partially purified material or refined into a terrorist or warfare agent, ricin could be used to expose people through the air, food, or water.

- In 1978, Georgi Markov, a Bulgarian writer and journalist who was living in London, died after he was attacked by a man with an umbrella. The umbrella had been rigged to inject a poison ricin pellet under Markov’s skin.

- In the 1940s the U.S. military experimented with using ricin as a possible warfare agent. In some reports ricin has possibly been used as a warfare agent in the 1980s in Iraq and more recently by terrorist organizations.

- Ricin poisoning is not contagious. Ricin-associated illness cannot be spread from person to person through casual contact. However, if you come into contact with someone who has ricin on their body or clothes, you could become exposed to it.

How ricin works

- Ricin works by getting inside the cells of a person’s body and preventing the cells from making the proteins they need. Without the proteins, cells die. Eventually this is harmful to the whole body, and death may occur.

- Effects of ricin poisoning depend on whether ricin was inhaled, ingested, or injected.

Signs and symptoms of ricin exposure

- The major symptoms of ricin poisoning depend on the route of exposure and the dose received, though many organs may be affected in severe cases.

- Initial symptoms of ricin poisoning by inhalation may occur as early as 4- 8 hours and as late as 24 hours after exposure. Following ingestion of ricin, initial symptoms typically occur in less than 10 hours.

- **Inhalation**: Within a few hours of inhaling significant amounts of ricin, the likely symptoms would be respiratory distress (difficulty breathing), fever, cough, nausea, and tightness in the chest. Heavy sweating may follow as well as fluid building up in the lungs (pulmonary edema). This would make breathing even more difficult, and the skin might turn blue. Excess fluid in the lungs would be diagnosed by x-ray or by listening to the chest with a stethoscope. Finally, low blood pressure and respiratory failure may occur, leading to death. In cases of known exposure to ricin, people having respiratory symptoms should seek medical care.

- **Ingestion**: If someone swallows a significant amount of ricin, he or she would likely develop vomiting and diarrhea that may become bloody. Severe dehydration may be the result, followed by low blood pressure. Other signs or symptoms may include seizures, and blood in the urine. Within several days, the person's liver, spleen, and kidneys might stop working, and the person could die.

- **Skin and eye exposure**: Ricin is unlikely to be absorbed through normal skin. Contact with ricin powders or products may cause redness and pain of the skin and the eyes. However, if you touch ricin that is on your skin and then eat food with your hands or put your hands in your mouth, you may ingest some.

- Death from ricin poisoning could take place within 36 to 72 hours of exposure, depending on the route of exposure (inhalation, ingestion, or injection) and the dose received.

BIOLOGICAL/CHEMICAL AGENT THREAT