



White Paper

Handle with Care: Red flags for suspicious mail and packages

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A series of parcel bombs and suspicious packages targeting two major cities in the US reinforces the need for individuals and businesses to install and enforce safe package handling techniques.

Explosive Package Incidents in Austin, Texas and Washington, DC

The FBI arrested an individual believed to be responsible for sending a series of potentially destructive devices to government facilities in the Washington, DC area on 26 March 2018. Authorities believe the suspect sent packages to the White House mail screening facility, CIA, and military facilities. Mail screeners at the various facilities deemed the packages suspicious when they identified components that could be used in explosive devices. Police do not believe the packages are linked to the recent bombings in Austin, Texas.

A series of parcel bombs in and around Austin, Texas killed two people and injured five between 2 and 20 March 2018. Authorities have linked six explosive devices to a serial bomber, who media outlets have identified as Mark Anthony Conditt. The explosive devices utilized various means of detonation—two packages detonated when the victims handled the parcels, one parcel detonated when the victim opened the box, and police believe one parcel bomb was triggered by tripwire possibly strung across a sidewalk. Law enforcement officials have not identified a motive for the bombings.

- There is a possibility that an individual could conduct a copycat incident with inert explosive materials to promote fear and intimidation or garner national media attention.

Safe Package Handling Best Practices



Mail handlers should familiarize themselves with red flags that may denote a potentially dangerous package or envelope. The following suspicious mail indicators are derived from US government best practices:

- Mail handlers should be aware that suspicious packages can appear in various forms, sizes, and labeling, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI). Anyone that handles mail should pay attention to packages with excessive postage, handwritten or poorly typed addresses, misspellings of common words, incorrect titles or titles without a name, threatening language, no return address, or a postmark from a city or state that does not match the return address.
- Mail handlers should be conscious of packages or mail that have excessive packaging materials, powdery substance felt through or appearing on the package or envelope, oily stains or discoloration, and lopsided or uneven packaging.
- Mail handlers should be cognizant of packages that are unattended, ticking, have excessive weight, or contain protruding wires or aluminum foil, according to the FBI.

If a mail handler suspects a postal item that they are handling contains an explosive or a radiological, chemical, or biological threat, they should cease handling the item, isolate the area where the package is located, evacuate the area, call 911, and wash their hands with soap and water.

A number of steps can be taken by businesses to safely handle packages and mail sent to their offices. The following recommendations, which are based on best practices adopted by the US government, can mitigate the risk a package or envelope may pose to a facility or individuals:

Centralize mail handling and processing operations at a location away from primary operating facilities. An offsite mail processing facility minimizes the risk a dangerous package can pose to employees and facilities.

Familiarize all employees that handle mail before it is screened with suspicious mail or package indicators. Develop and implement procedures for employees to follow in the event a suspicious package is identified.

Distribute a list of suspicious package indicators to all mail handlers. The US Postal Service has a Suspicious Mail or Packages [handout](#) on their website that visualizes red flags and what to do in the event a dangerous parcel is identified.