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RISK MANAGEMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL, HEALTH & SAFETY

California State University, Los Angeles

Guidelines for Handling Suspicious Mail/Package

Many people have questions about how they should handle the mail and what should they do in light of current events involving chemicals or biological material being sent through the mail system to unknowing recipients. Staff and employees at this university should be aware that the *University Police/Public Safety, Mail Services, Shipping and Receiving, and the Office of Environmental Health and Safety* are working together to ensure the protection of our students, faculty, and staff here at this campus. In an effort to address these concerns, we have jointly prepared this informational document to give you guidance regarding what you should do, in a number of different situations, if you receive or open mail which you believe may be suspicious or contaminated. However, it is impossible to screen every item that arrives on this campus and every individual needs to exercise judgment and discretion and become familiar with the following procedures addressing the most likely situations which may occur.

General precautions for those handling large volumes of mail:

- Wash your hands with warm water and soap before and after handling mail.
- Do not eat, drink, apply cosmetics, or smoke around the mail.
- Surgical Masks, eye protection, gowns are NOT necessary and are NOT recommended. If you have open cuts or lesions on your skin, disposable latex gloves would be appropriate.
- If you notice any suspicious package or letter, inform a supervisor immediately.

If you open a letter that contains a threat or a white powder:

- Do not panic.
- Calmly and slowly lay the envelope down.

- If immediately available, lay something over the top of the envelope (a sheet of paper, a plastic bag, etc.). Do not walk around with the letter, show it to others, or shake it!!
- Remove yourself from the immediate area and notify those working around you to do the same. Everyone should relocate in a calm manner. Evacuation of the entire building is not necessary at this point.
- Have someone call 911 on a campus phone or 323-343-3700 on a cell phone 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.
- Wash your hands with warm water and soap for one minute.
- Do not allow anyone to leave the office or area that might have touched or been exposed to the envelope.
- List all people who were in the room or area when this suspicious letter or package was identified. Give this list to responding law enforcement officials.
- Emergency responders will arrive shortly and they will provide further instructions.

You receive a piece of mail and are concerned or fearful of opening it:

- Don't open it!
- Call 911 on a campus phone or 323-343-3700 on a cell phone. The letter or package will be removed and bagged. Give the arriving officer or safety personnel information that indicates your concerns regarding the envelope or package. You will be contacted shortly afterwards with additional information.

Characteristics of Suspicious Mail:

[Source: Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services]

- Excessive postage
- Handwritten or poorly typed addresses
- Incorrect titles
- Title, but no name
- Misspellings of common words
- Oily stains, discoloration or odor
- No return address
- Excessive weight
- Lopsided or uneven envelope

- Protruding wires or aluminum foil
- Excessive security material such as masking tape, string, etc.
- Visual distractions
- Ticking sound
- Marked with restrictive endorsements, such as "Personal" or "Confidential"

Important Follow-up Actions:

The University Police Department requests that any threatening mail received by administrators, staff or faculty of the university be immediately sequestered and not handled any further. Prompt notice then should be made to the Police Department for secure pick-up, tracking and further investigation. It is important that the mail/package not be handled any further, and that the envelope and letter/item be retained “as-is” for Police pick-up. Questions related to this practice or procedure should be directed to Police Lt. Bohannon at 323-343-2537 and/or Chief Richard Wall at 323-343-3737.