

DO NOT REFER CALLS TO THE STATE OR LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT EMERGENCY NUMBERS, BUT RATHER FOLLOW CAREFULLY THE PROTOCOL OUTLINED BELOW:

Guidelines for Emergency Management/Public Safety Personnel Regarding Suspicious Packages and Correspondence

The Michigan State Police Emergency Management Division has received numerous inquiries from local public safety first responders, dispatch centers and emergency management officials during the past two days about protocols and procedures for responding to hoaxes or suspicious situations being reported as Anthrax cases. Most cases reported thus far have involved envelopes or packages received in the mail that contain small quantities of some white powdery substance, or correspondence from foreign countries (such as Nigeria or Pakistan) that contain no visible evidence of any contaminant. Almost none of these incidents involved any apparent evidence or indication (such as a note) that the envelopes contained Anthrax or any other bioterrorism agent. Thus far, none of the samples submitted to the Michigan Department of Community Health laboratory has tested positive for any biologic agent, and no one in Michigan has been diagnosed with any form of Anthrax infection.

Certainly the current atmosphere of public anxiety regarding further terrorist attacks has made people hypersensitive, and public safety agencies have been overburdened responding to calls that lack any credible threat of bioterrorism. Following are recommendations from the Emergency Management Division for screening and responding to these situations:

- Calls of suspicious packages or substances should be referred to the local law enforcement agency (i.e., MSP post, sheriff's office or municipal/township police department) for response.
- Responding officers should not handle or come into close contact with the suspicious material if it is clearly visible from a distance. If it is necessary to handle the material in order to evaluate it, the officers should wear surgical gloves and masks and wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling.
- Responding officers should contact the regional FBI office or the on-duty FBI Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) coordinator for consultation regarding proper handling of the case. If it does not appear that criminal investigation or a hazardous materials response is warranted, the citizen may be advised to dispose of the package. **The state health department will only accept requests for testing through the FBI's WMD coordinator.**

- If there is evidence to suggest a credible threat of biologic contamination (a threatening note **or** a large quantity of unknown powdery substance), the FBI will recommend the appropriate procedures for handling the case as a criminal investigation involving hazardous materials. Samples of the suspect material must be triple-bagged and transported to the Michigan Department of Community Health Laboratory at 3350 N. Martin Luther King Blvd. in Lansing. Local public health labs or MSP crime labs will not accept the samples for testing.
- If a criminal investigation is commenced and samples collected for analysis, the incident report should include complete information (names, addresses, phone numbers) of all persons who handled or were exposed to the substance and location of the event.
- Chain of custody documentation should be initiated immediately and accompany the specimen.
- Please do not send any person to the Emergency Room unless he or she appears seriously ill. (The state health department is not recommending that “exposed” persons be tested and treated for anthrax.)
- Laboratory test results will be reported back to the local health department and the submitting agency by the state health department.