

**STATE OF VERMONT
AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS**

: 409.07

Subject: Safe [Mail](#) Handling

Effective Date: **Review and Re-Issue Date:**

Supersedes: 414.05 **APA Rule Number:**
11/05/01

Recommended for approval by:
**Jacqueline Kotkin, Assistant Director/
Correctional Services**

Authorized By:
Richard C. Turner, Acting Commissioner

Signature **Date**

1/16/03

Signature **Date**

1/16/03

1. Authority:

1.1 Title 28 V.S.A. § 101 (1), 102 (c) (6) and (12)

2. Purpose:

2.1 It is important that the Department of Corrections insure the protection of its staff and [inmates](#) in the processing of its mail on a daily basis. This directive will assist staff in processing the bulk of its normal mail load and assist in how to identify and handle letters or parcels that should be viewed as suspicious. It is important to recognize the majority of our mail is routine and originates from known sources and should be viewed as non-suspicious and handled as such. There may be pieces that should be viewed as suspicious or threatening and they should be handled in a different, more cautious manner.

3. Applicability/Accessibility:

3.1. This Directive applies directly to Department of Corrections' staff and the [offenders](#) under their supervision and control. Anyone may access this policy.

4. Directive:

4.1 Staff processing mail will set aside any mail deemed to fit the criteria established for suspicious or threatening mail. All mail will be opened. Mail will be opened with gloves and optional mask in an assigned mail handling room. The room may be a multi-purpose room, except when the mail is being opened. There should be no attempt to modify the air-handling or venting system of that room without the Department of Buildings and General Services involvement. Efforts must be made to change the ventilation system in the mail room to separate airflow from the rest of the site. The usual building change process should be followed.

4.2 Suspicious or threatening mail will be handled separately with a supervisor present. The supervisor will oversee the remainder of the mail handling of suspicious mail.

4.3 All mail must be received in a non-essential area of the institution/office and ALL packages and mail will be opened. Larger packages and deliveries can be inspected outside of the buildings. A member of the medical staff must open medical packages. We absolutely cannot risk any contaminated letter or package being opened inside a facility or work place. Local procedure needs to be coordinated with the Buildings and General Services representative if a State owned building and the landlord if privately owned building being rented or leased. In case of possible or actual contamination, the area must be sealed off without effecting normal operations.

4.4 Only staff trained in safe mail handling procedures may enter the room while the mail is being processed.

4.5 Staff who must receive confidential mail will open it in the designated area only. Those staff receiving confidential mail must receive training in safe handling procedures and follow the mail handling procedure prescribed in this memorandum.

4.6 Suspicious offender mail will be opened and inspected in the designated mail area by trained staff. Offender legal mail will be opened. Staff will not read any legal mail. Offender mail that would ordinarily be read will still be read per local procedure. A memo will be posted in the living units explaining the purpose of this procedure.

5. Mail Opening Procedure:

5.1 Staff designated to open mail are required to wear gloves. Regular disposable dust mask are to be provided for those who choose to wear them.

5.2 Inspect the outside of the package. Discretion is particularly important when inspecting correspondence to and from offenders. This correspondence often exhibits one or more of the following characteristics under normal conditions. The following list has been provided by the [CDC](#) and covers a wide area of concern. The correctional environment is a special area and much of our mail often exhibits the same characteristics identified by the CDC. Correctional staff needs to exercise

caution and some common sense when dealing with packages and mail (suspicious mail/packages may go beyond the listed indicators):

- Excessive postage
- Handwritten or poorly written 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 foil
- Excessive tape, string etc.
- Ticking sound
- Shows a city or state in the postmark that does not match the return address.

6. Handling of Non-Suspicious Letters/Packages:

6.1 Mail that is determined to be non-suspicious or threatening will be distributed and opened in the normal process. An example of such mail is that which we receive on a regular basis from agencies, groups, or individuals. Packages are to be treated in the same manor. Staff is still required to wear gloves, at a minimum, and wash hands properly after handling all mail.

7. Handling of Suspicious Letters/Packages:

7.1 If a package is determined to be suspicious before it's opened, follow the steps below:

7.1.1 Do not disturb or handle the package more than necessary and do not open it.

7.1.2 Place the package in a clear plastic bag, seal it, and mark with date, time, and name of person bagging the item.

7.1.3 Remove the gloves and mask before leaving the room, depositing them into the same bag, and seal.

7.1.4 Dispose of the sealed bag in accordance with local procedure.

7.1.5 Wash hands immediately using soap and water.

7.1.6 Notify the Superintendent, CRSU Supervisor or supervisory designee of the suspicious package.

7.1.7 The Superintendent, CRSU Supervisor or supervisory designee will contact local emergency authorities as well as Buildings Personnel, who will handle suspicious mail.

8. Spills of powder or other suspicious substances:

8.1 If a suspicious substance spills onto a surface but not on a person follow the steps below:

8.1.1 Direct others to leave the designated area.

8.1.2 Notify the superintendent or supervisor.

8.1.2.1. Site managers and Superintendents will develop a response agreement with their designated law enforcement office regarding the next steps.

8.1.2.2. Leave the package where it is, do not clean substance up. Leave gloves and mask in the room.

8.1.2.3. Wash hands with soap and water.

8.1.2.4. Do not clean the area until law enforcement, HAZMAT team or the Health Department has assessed the situation as outlined in the local agreement established in (10).

8.1.3. Comply with all instructions or directions established in the local agreement.

8.1.4. Notify Buildings and General Services personnel.

8.2 If a suspicious substance comes into contact with a person follow the steps below:

8.2.1 Notify the superintendent or supervisor who will follow the procedure established in below.

8.2.2 If others in the same room do not have visible powder or unknown substance on them, they should remove gloves and mask (leaving them in the designated area) and leave.

8.2.2.1 Individuals that have visible powder or other unknown substance on them may be required to remove their clothing by trained emergency responders (balancing privacy concerns with the need to limit additional contamination of the surrounding environment). As long as there are no immediate symptoms, clothing removal may not have to take place immediately. Place the clothes in a plastic bag. Leave the room and redress in the alternate clothing (jumpsuits) outside the mailroom (local procedures should insure privacy and dignity in this process). Again, this will be at the direction of trained emergency responders.

8.2.3. Wash, with soap and water, hands and any skin that had contact with the substance.

8.2.4. Showering may be done later.

8.2.5. Await arrival of local and/or state responders according to local agreement.

8.2.6. Make a list of all people who had contact with the substance and give it to public health authorities.

9. Threatening Letter:

9.1 If a threatening letter is received, it is to be processed with the local authorities.

9.2 A threatening letter with a substance will be processed as outlined above.

10. Work Site Managers:

10.1 All work sites should maintain a small supply of disposable jumpsuits, gloves, and filtration masks. The supplies must be kept outside the mailroom.

10.2 All work site managers will develop a local procedure for handling mail following the guidelines prescribed in this Directive along with the local agreements with designated law enforcement agencies. Those managers of work sites that share space with other agencies are encouraged to meet with those agency managers. All managers in one building may agree upon a single designated mailroom to be used by all departments in the building. The work site procedure will be sent to the Chief of Emergency Services for approval.

11. Training Method:

11.1 Functional Directors are responsible for training their work site managers in this directive. The work site managers are responsible for training their respective staff.

12. Quality Assurance Process:

12.1 The Chief of Emergency Services shall oversee an audit process of the Safe Mail Handling directive 14 days from the date of the safe mail handling training. The second audit will be conducted one month from the date of the first. Audits will be conducted quarterly.

13. Financial Impact:

13.1 Cost associated with protective clothing and gloves will be incorporated into each work site's budget.

14. Responsible Director and Draft Participants:

The Directors of Security & Supervision, the Director of Reparative Services and the Assistant Director of Correctional Services are responsible for this Directive.

This Directive was written by John B. Murphy, Hearings Administrator and Gary Dillion, Chief of Emergency Services after consideration of feedback solicited from the field as well as review and guidance from the Executive Management Team (EMT).