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Information

The City of Troy Police Department is distributing this Information Bulletin to the area business. City of Troy Police and Fire Departments have approved the guidelines set forth. As of yet, we have had no reports of ricin laced letters here in Troy. We have placed on our website several links to some Homeland Security sites. For more details, you can look at some of the following websites: Center for Disease Control, U.S. Homeland Security, Ready.Gov or the Michigan State Police. The City of Troy Police Department encourages recipients of this Information Bulletin to report information concerning suspicious or criminal activity to us. The City of Troy has a Threat Assessment Team that will investigate these types of incidents.

Details

On the afternoon of February 2, 2004, Senate staff observed gray granular powder on an automated mail opening system. Preliminary field tests indicated the possible presence of a biological toxin. Samples of the material were tested overnight at a government laboratory and results indicated the presence of ricin. The three Senate Office Buildings were closed and secured on February 3rd. The samples were forwarded to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia and on February 4th three out of the four samples tested positive. At this time no threat letter has been identified and no threat has been received.

Background on Ricin

Ricin is a poison that can be made from the waste (mash) left over from processing castor beans. Ricin can be made in the form of an off-white *powder*, a *mist*, or a *pellet* or it can be dissolved in water or weak acid. It would take a deliberate act to make Ricin and use it to poison people. Ricin is one of several toxins that exert toxicity by inhibiting protein synthesis. Ricin can enter the body through inhalation, ingestion, abraded (non-intact) skin, mucosal membranes (e.g., eyes and nose), and injection. Ricin poisoning is not contagious, and person-to-person transmission does not occur.

Toxicity

Exposure to ricin may occur through:

- Inhalation, skin, or eye contact: as an aerosol, powder, or dust
- Ingestion: through contamination of food, water, or consumer products
- Injection: directly through the skin

Ricin toxicity and lethality can vary by dose and route of exposure. In animal studies, inhalation and intravenous injection have been shown as the most lethal routes.

SUGGESTED PROTECTIVE MEASURES

Suggested Actions for Mail Room, Postal and Shipping Facility

Operators

Two categories of actions are necessary: 1) Identifying and assessing biological (including ricin) threats; 2) Managing biological threats that appear credible.

Identifying and Assessing Biological Threats

Several commercial handheld or test-strip ricin detection devices are available; however the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have stated that the performance of these assays is unknown.

Measures that can be taken without installing special detection equipment are the same for most biological threats and are organized according to whether the mail is opened or unopened and whether it contains a written threat or an unidentified container:

Opened mail that is leaking a suspicious liquid or powder, or mail that has a suspicious odor: If you open a letter or package and see an unknown material, or if an unknown material is leaking from the mail as a liquid, powder, or odor, *do not try to clean it up or otherwise disturb it*. Set the mail down on a stable surface and call your local police or fire departments designated to respond to this type of threat.

Opened mail that contains a written threat: If anyone in the organization opens a letter or package *with or without powder* and discovers a written threat, such as a note that says "You have been contaminated with ricin," put the package or letter down on a stable surface and call your local police/fire departments designated to deal with this type of threat.

Unopened mail: Whenever a mail center worker identifies an unopened package or letter as "suspicious", a mail center supervisor or specially trained employee should examine the mail piece to confirm that it meets the "suspicious" criteria established for the location (e.g., it is covered with powder or appears saturated from the inside). If confirmed, *do not open it*. A supervisor or designated mail center worker who is trained to confirm the identification must be available during all working hours.

Next, determine if the mail piece is addressed to a person who actually works in the facility. If so, and if the addressee can be located in a reasonable period of time, contact the addressee and ask him or her to identify the package. If the addressee recognizes the package and is certain it is not threatening, deliver it. If the addressee does not recognize the package, or if you cannot locate the addressee, attempt to contact the individual listed on the return address to verify the contents of the package. If you successfully contact the sender of the package, ask them to provide a description of the contents, intended addressee, and the reason it was mailed to your location. Provide this information to the addressee for further verification.

If the addressee does not recognize the package, or if you cannot locate the addressee, *do not open it*. The supervisor or designated mail center worker should call the previously designated police or fire departments. This first responder will be responsible for opening the package.