



SOUTH WEST  
**CTIU**  
Counter Terrorism Intelligence Unit



## ■ Protective Security Guidance



# MAIL HANDLING

**A booklet for Security Managers  
&  
Post Room Staff**

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- 1.1 The threat of a terrorist attack in the United Kingdom is a very real aspect of everyday life. This together with the emerging threat from Domestic Extremist (DE) groups has become of increasing concern to companies and organisations as a small number of activists are not only targeting individuals or groups at business premises but also in their own homes.
- 1.2 Both terrorists and criminals wishing to cause harm or disruption have previously used postal and courier services to deliver hazardous items to targeted recipients.
- 1.3 Even in this electronic age, most businesses and other organisations still rely on their ability to receive and send physical items of mail. So we all need to be vigilant, especially in areas that may be potential targets for extremist groups, or simply people with a grudge.
- 1.4 A properly conducted risk assessment should identify the vulnerabilities your organisation needs to consider. This will enable you to implement procedures to mitigate or reduce the overall risk to your staff.
- 1.5 This booklet is aimed at assisting anyone involved in dealing with mail arriving at their premises. It will complement staff awareness training and provide an understanding of the current threat and associated risks. It also includes how you can prepare for such eventualities, what to look out for and what to do should a package be considered suspicious.
- 1.6 Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) in letters or parcels and CBR mail (chemical, biological, radiological) can take various forms. A delivered item will probably have received some fairly rough handling in the post and so is unlikely to detonate by being moved, but any attempt at opening it, however slight, may set it off or release the contents. Unless delivered by a courier, it is unlikely to contain a timing device. A well-made device will look innocuous but there are certain pointers, which if encountered, should immediately arouse suspicion. (Further details on page 8)
- 1.7 Staff dealing with incoming mail should receive regular training/awareness on this subject. It should be standard practise to familiarise new staff members with this booklet and your response procedures before they commence post-sorting duties.
- 1.8 Further information concerning protective security and the threat from terrorism can be obtained via the Counter Terrorism Security Adviser (CTSA) office. Choose the following link for your area:

CTSA@avonandsomerset.police.uk  
CTSA@dorset.police.uk  
CTSA@devonandcornwall.police.uk  
CTSA@Gloucestershire.police.uk  
CTSA@Wiltshire.police.uk

- 2.1 Rooms allocated for the receipt, sorting and distribution of mail should have certain features and equipment in order to provide adequate security. It is appreciated that there will sometimes be limitations in complying with these requirements due to location and available accommodation. The features mentioned within this booklet should however be borne in mind and adopted if practicable.
- 2.2 A 'secure' post room should be:
- A dedicated facility for the receipt, delivery and onward distribution of mail.
  - Restricted to only post room staff and serviced by one lockable door for entry and egress in order to restrict unnecessary interruptions during the sorting of post.
  - Be fitted with a telephone and staff should have easy access to a list of 'emergency' telephone numbers (see annex A) e.g. Security Manager, Medical/First Aid representative and persons responding to the incident.

And have

- A suitable flat surfaced 'sorting' counter where all mail can be seen and inspected.
- Bladed letter openers – mail should not be opened by hand.
- Windows that open and close easily and are secured when not in use.
- Suitable lighting that will provide good levels of illumination.
- Control of any ventilation or air conditioning system from inside the room.
- A method of raising an alarm without exiting the room.
- Clear plastic containers which can be placed over suspicious items, if appropriate.
- Charts or posters outlining 'Immediate Actions' in the event of various incidents. Examples in Annex C & D.
- Have a sign that will indicate 'Room out of bounds' – 'DO NOT ENTER'.
- Suspect package Incident report. (see Annex E)



- 3.1 Organisations should also consider the allocation of a 'safe' room or area that can be used in the event of a suspected Chemical, Biological or Radiological incident within the post room.

The safe room should be:

- An area that can be closed once post room staff enter.
  - A room that will allow the staff to be located away from the contamination.
  - A facility where staff can be checked for contamination or decontaminated.
  - A room with a telephone and relevant contact list.
- 3.2 The safe room should ideally be located close to, but not an annexe of the post room. This room should contain an 'incident box' or 'grab bag' with the following items stored within:
- Paper suits & shoe covers
  - Surgical gloves
  - Dust masks
  - Sealable clear plastic bags
  - A box of tissues
  - Eyewash solution
  - Bottled water - for washing
  - Liquid soap
  - Bleach
  - Disinfectant
  - A warning sign (CONTAMINATED AREA – KEEP OUT)

Further information concerning personal protective equipment (PPE) can be found [www.hse.go.uk](http://www.hse.go.uk)

- 3.3 It is important that a comprehensive response plan is put in place by the organisation so that any incident can be dealt with in a timely and effective manner.
- 3.4 Once a response plan is in place, staff should be provided with adequate and regular training.

- 4.1 Criminals and terrorists are continuously developing and evolving their attack methods. This section deals with the more commonly known methods that can be potentially used via the postal system. All of the attack methods highlighted within this booklet HAVE previously been used by criminals.



### Improvised Explosive Device (IED)

An IED can be incorporated within a letter or parcel and may contain Home Made Explosives (HME), commercial or military grade explosive materials. This device is designed to kill and/or injure the person opening or handling the item. Depending on the quality and quantity of explosive materials, it may also destroy buildings.



### Foreign materials (sharps/glass etc.)

These types of potentially dangerous and harmful materials can be packed within parcels or letters and are primarily designed to injure and harm the person opening the mailed item (damage to fingers and hands). This style of attack method has previously been used by disgruntled people targeting a specific person or appointment within an organisation.



### Chemicals

Chemicals can be contained within a letter or parcel with the intention of harming the person opening it and also those in the vicinity. Corrosives such as acids may cause harm and injury to an individual through inhalation.



### Incendiary device

A parcel or letter can contain substances or materials that, through contact with an ignition source (including oxygen), can ignite causing a 'high' burning flame. This can cause harm and injury to the person opening the mail and people within the vicinity. This form of attack can also cause the spread of fire in a short period of time within a building.



### Biological materials

Biological materials can also be placed within letters and parcels. This method of delivery is designed to cause harm, injury and even death to a person or group of people within the vicinity of the mail being opened. The types of biological materials can range from human waste or fluids such as infected blood, through to laboratory grade biological substances such as Anthrax which can be delivered in liquid or powder form. (Commonly known as a 'White Powder' attack)



### Radiological materials

Radioactive materials can be placed within a letter or parcel in order to cause harm, injury and death. This method of attack has the potential to affect many people through the spread of contamination in a confined area. Fortunately, radioactive materials are extremely hard to come by.

- 5.1 It is accepted that an awareness of the threat and the types of attack methods via the mail system can cause fear but this awareness must also be balanced by likelihood.

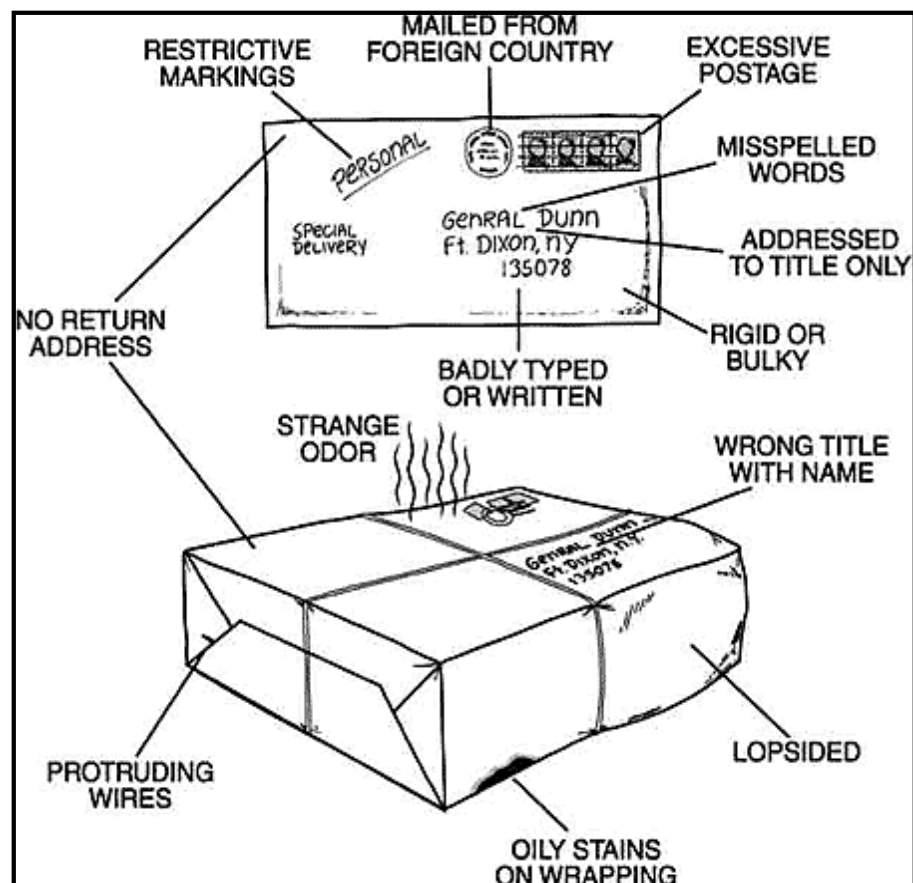
These types of attack are rare events with most 'suspicious' packages being innocent items. Effective training and information about what we should be looking for concerning suspicious mail will provide us with a robust and effective first line of defence.

- 5.3 It is therefore important that we acknowledge and understand what is suspicious and what we should be on the look out for. Although the look alone of a specific piece of mail is not confirmation of a potentially dangerous package, there will be certain things that draw our attention to it. These things will raise our suspicion and allow us to take appropriate and immediate action in order to protect ourselves and our colleagues.

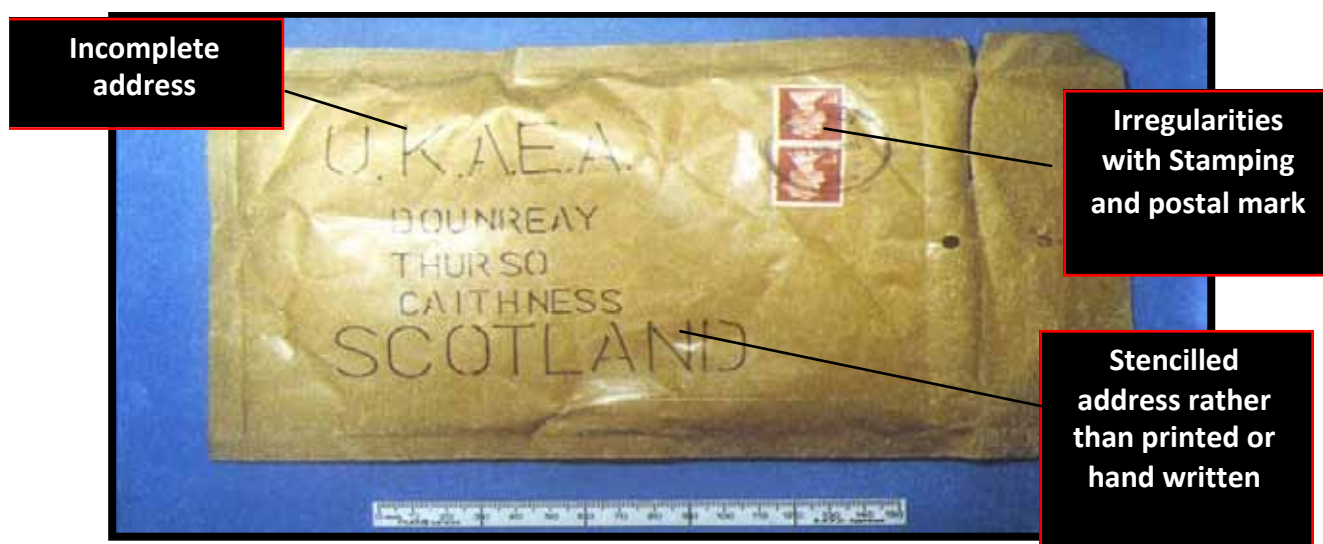
- 5.4 Listed below are some 'indicators' that will help you assess any suspicious mail:

- Size – Is the letter or package big enough to house a device without it being too obvious? (Jiffy bags, video tapes etc)
- Shape – Is the package shape irregular? Lumps that may suggest added items such as wires or batteries etc.
- Sender – Do you recognise who has sent this item from the post mark, label or typeface? Does the information on the package add up? Can you confirm with the sender?
- Stamped – Has the postage been paid, or does it have more postage than necessary, is the post mark blurred, smudged or missing?
- Seal – Has there been an excessive use of tape or staples to seal the letter/parcel? This could be an indication of the contents not being a normal mail item.
- Stains – Are there any oily or greasy stains (smudges or finer prints) on the packaging? Some explosive or biological materials may sweat or weep when contained within a parcel or letter.
- Smells – Explosives can exude a variety of pungent smells such as the smell of marzipan or almonds. Other odours may be added to try and mask this smell (perfumes etc).

## EXAMPLE 1



## EXAMPLE 2



- 5.6 Examples 1 & 2 above show a few things that should arouse suspicion. The address has been written using a stencil which may indicate that the sender does not want to use handwriting. The address is actually incomplete. Note the careless stamping of the parcel! These things alone do not make this a threatening item of mail but should definitely raise suspicion.



## IMMEDIATE ACTION - IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICE (IED) OR INCENDIARY DEVICE



- 6.1 Listed below are the immediate actions that should be carried out in the event of a suspicious package being detected from an IED perspective:
- Place the package on the nearest firm surface. Make no attempt to open it.
  - If an approved bomb container is to hand, the suspect item should be placed inside.
  - Do not touch or move the package further.
  - Request other staff present to leave the room as quickly as possible.
  - Mobile phones and hand held radios should not be used within 15 metres of any suspect device - This is a minimum distance.
  - Prevent other persons from entering the room by displaying appropriate notice(s).
  - It is important for the emergency services to gain access to the IED therefore all doors leading to the suspect device should be left open. If it is possible the windows of the room should be opened before you leave.
  - It is up to the Security Manager to decide if it is necessary to evacuate the building. If you choose to do so staff must be directed outside the cordon. Police advise a minimum cordon distance of 100 metres for a small item (letter or small parcel). Ideally, this should be behind hard cover and away from glazing. Wider cordons will be put in place for larger devices.
  - The person(s) who found the device should be available to provide information to the emergency services. He/she should, if possible, be encouraged to write the information down as soon as possible describing the device, why it is suspicious and exact location.
  - Do not submerge in water or cover with sand.
  - Do not take the package to the Security Manager's office.

## IF YOU SUSPECT MAIL TO CONTAIN CHEMICAL, BIOLOGICAL OR RADIOLOGICAL MATERIAL



7.1 Listed below are the emergency actions that should be carried out in the event of a suspect package from a Chemical, Biological and Radiological (CBR) perspective:

- Do not open to examine.
- Do not touch, sniff, prod, tamper with or move elsewhere.
- Close all windows and doors. Turn off air conditioning and fans.
- If possible, place a clear plastic container over the item.
- Secure the post room and, if locked, a key must be available for emergency services. Ensure visible notice on door to prevent unauthorised access.
- All occupants in suspect area should evacuate to a safe room close by. It is vitally important to avoid contact with others to prevent contamination. No one should leave the building unless advised to do so.
- Do not attend any hospital; they will not have facilities to deal with you. If necessary decontamination and medical advice will be dealt with at the scene.
- Inform the security manager of deputy who will organise internal action. Ensure the Police are contacted on 999.
- Wash your hands. Do not rub your eyes or wash your face unless you think the substance has come into contact with it. Do not touch other people. If possible try to contain any water used in a bowl.
- If you suspect there is a contaminant on your outer clothing carefully remove and seal in a plastic bag. If an individual experiences discomfort following contact with what appears to be a corrosive material wash with copious amounts of water.
- Blow your nose with clean tissue and store the soiled tissue in a plastic sealed bag. If time permits complete checklist (see annex D) as the information may assist emergency services.
- Specialist Police officers will attend with analysis equipment to identify the substance in order to implement appropriate remedial action (if any).
- Whilst on route the Emergency Services will communicate with those involved to give advice. They will be able to provide advice concerning washing/decontamination processes and clothing removal. Remember most incidents are false alarms.
- The Police will forensically recover any suspect substance.

- 8.1 The first rule concerning security responses and procedures is simple, empower your staff to take immediate action in order to save life and prevent injury.
- 8.2 A simple but clear model for a response to any suspicious item of mail can be found at Annex C to this document.
- 8.3 It is important to note that, once staff are trained and security aware, their response to any suspicious incident may result in a full evacuation of that area or building.
- 8.4 In the event of a full building evacuation, a system for raising the general alarm to evacuate needs to be identified.
- 8.5 Evacuated rooms should be secured to ensure nobody enters a potentially dangerous environment. It is important to note that a key or access code will need to be available for the emergency responders.
- 8.6 An evacuation plan for the post room and premises should be developed should the alarm be raised concerning a suspicious package within the building. This plan should follow 'best practice' for that of a bomb warning.
- 8.7 The organisation will need to develop an evacuation plan in response to a 'White Powder' type incident. The focus of which needs to be based on:
- Containment
  - Evacuation
  - Security
  - Decontamination

**Please note the term 'White Powder' is commonly used to describe suspicious substances, however the substances could be any COLOUR.**

- 8.8 It is anticipated that any 'suspicious incident' will probably require the evacuation of the immediate area the post room is located within. Thereafter, a risk assessment may lead to a full building evacuation.
- 8.9 Again, it would follow that the response to any incident of this type should be incorporated within the organisation training plan.

## WELFARE

- 9.1 This booklet has dealt with the “before” and “during” an incident of a suspect package being found.
- 9.2 An incident of this kind can be very traumatic for those involved. Aftercare should be considered for every occurrence of a suspect package being discovered whether it subsequently turns out to be a live incident or not.
- 9.3 It is very important to reinforce the message that although these incidents have a potentially high impact on people and the organisation, the likelihood of your staff being involved in such an occurrence is extremely low.
- 9.4 It is also important that managers understand the importance of discussing the issues raised within the booklet in order to ‘better prepare’ their staff for such an incident. A combination of good working practice and staff awareness training will achieve preparedness and reinforce the importance of vigilance concerning the threat and risks within a post room mail handling department or team.

## TRAINING

- 10.1 Specific training will prepare managers and personnel engaged in mail handling to be able to identify and react to a suspicious incident concerning mail.
- 10.2 Training for mail handling staff can be broken down into three main areas:
  - Core training – Mail handling and sorting.  
As required in order to perform the duties associated with mail handling.
  - Security awareness training – Suspicious packages and letters.  
This should encompass; threat, risks, attack methodology, immediate actions, evacuation, containment and contamination/decontamination.
  - First aid training – to include CBR (white powder incident).  
To include; threat, risks, attack methods, early signs & symptoms, inhalation, ingestion, absorption, immediate action, containment and decontamination.
- 10.3 It is the responsibility of managers to ensure adequate training is provided for all staff engaged in the mail handling process within their organisation.

- 11.1 Even though the threat concerning post within our mail systems is low, the risks associated with the threat and various 'attack' methods would cause harm to people.
- 11.2 It is therefore important that organisations ensure they:
- Provide effective and adequate training for all staff involved in the mail receipt and handling process.
  - Confirm the working environment is suitable and secure for staff to safely handle mail.
  - Have instructions, guidance and efficient procedures in place and practiced regarding what to do in the event of a suspicious package or letter being detected.
  - Design and test suitable responses to these types of incidents such as a 'White Powder' incident.
  - Actively promote the awareness of the threat and risks to their organisation.
- 11.3 Training, awareness, vigilance and effective procedures will greatly reduce the likelihood of a 'successful' attack via our postal system and therefore reduce the overall risk to your staff, buildings, and reputation.
- 11.4 This booklet should be provided to all staff engaged in the mail collection, delivery and sorting system alongside annual training awareness sessions.
- 11.5 Further guidance can be sought by contacting your local CTSA office on one of the following email addresses,

[CTSA@avonandsomerset.police.uk](mailto:CTSA@avonandsomerset.police.uk)

[CTSA@dorset.police.uk](mailto:CTSA@dorset.police.uk)

[CTSA@devonandcornwall.police.uk](mailto:CTSA@devonandcornwall.police.uk)

[CTSA@Gloucestershire.police.uk](mailto:CTSA@Gloucestershire.police.uk)

[CTSA@Wiltshire.police.uk](mailto:CTSA@Wiltshire.police.uk)

**IF YOU SUSPECT IT - REPORT IT IMMEDIATELY**

EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBERS

To be displayed within the mail handling working areas.

Security Office -

Medical /First Aid assistance -

Department Manager -

Ambulance/ Fire/Police - 999







## **SAFE ROOM INCIDENT EQUIPMENT**

### **THE FOLLOWING ITEMS SHOULD BE CONTAINED WITHIN A INCIDENT BOX**

- First aid kit (plasters, small & medium dressings, surgical tape, eye wash, surgical gloves, scissors) as a minimum.
- Clear plastic sacks/bags (preferably sealable)
- Bottled water (still) x three 1 litre bottles - for washing, do not drink.
- Disinfectant x one 1 litre bottle (surgical type for skin contact)
- Cloths / sponges x 3
- Paper suits x 3
- Paper foot covers x 3
- Surgical gloves x 3
- Water container x one three litre
- Nail brush x 3
- Eye protection x 3
- Paper face mask x 3
- Instructions for personal decontamination x 3

This box should be held within the safe room (if available) and regularly checked for content and serviceability.

## SUSPICIOUS MAIL ITEM RESPONSE MODEL

<b>Improved Explosive Device</b>    	<b>Chemical, Biological and Radiological</b>    	<b>Sharps</b>    
<b>RAISE ALARM</b>	<b>RAISE ALARM</b>	<b>INFORM STAFF</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>DO NOT TAMPER!</b></li> <li>• Inform staff</li> <li>• Doors leading to suspect device should be left open</li> <li>• Fire alarm</li> <li>• Evacuate Building</li> <li>• Ring 999</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>DO NOT TAMPER!</b></li> <li>• Inform staff</li> <li>• Close windows</li> <li>• Cover with clear plastic box</li> <li>• Shut down air conditioning</li> <li>• Secure post room</li> <li>• Move to 'Safe room'</li> <li>• Ring 999</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>DO NOT TAMPER!</b></li> <li>• Inform staff</li> <li>• Leave on flat surface</li> <li>• Contact manager</li> <li>• First aid if required</li> </ul>
<p>Although unconfirmed, there is a real danger of this type of suspicious package detonating. It is important that the alarm is raised and building cleared as soon as practicable.</p>	<p>You must ensure that the alarm is raised so the evacuation process can be initiated. Move directly to a safe room in order to remove yourself from immediate danger. Follow the procedures for decontamination and containment which will be inside the Security box.</p>	<p>Ensure that all other staff are aware of the danger, isolate the package and inform your line manager of this incident immediately.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not re-enter the room</li> <li>• Reinforce evacuation message 'Suspect Package – IED'</li> <li>• Be prepared to provide information for responders (Emergency Services &amp; ATO)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not let any other staff into the post room</li> <li>• Take all staff who may be exposed to the safe room</li> <li>• Do not re-enter the room</li> <li>• Start decontamination immediately</li> <li>• Be prepared to provide responders with information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not touch any other parcels or letters</li> <li>• Treat any injuries using the First aid box</li> <li>• Wait for assistance from management</li> </ul>



## SUSPECT PACKAGE INCIDENT REPORT

<b>What</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has happened?</li> <li>• Has been found?</li> <li>• Makes the item suspicious?</li> <li>• How did it get there?</li> </ul>	
<b>Where is it?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Location</li> <li>• Floor</li> <li>• Room</li> <li>• Area</li> <li>• How did it get there?</li> </ul>	
<b>When?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time found?</li> <li>• Time reported?</li> <li>• Time spent in contamination?</li> </ul>	
<b>Who?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Found it?</li> <li>• Reported it?</li> <li>• Responded?</li> <li>• Any other witnesses?</li> <li>• Anyone contaminated?</li> <li>• Showing signs of any medical conditions?</li> </ul>	
<b>Action</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report</li> <li>• Evaluation</li> <li>• Response</li> </ul>	

1. To be completed as soon as possible after discovery of a suspect package.

## SOURCE OF ADVICE AND INFORMATION

Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure. [www.cpni.gov.uk](http://www.cpni.gov.uk)

Contains guidance and information on a broad range of relevant topics, including threats to UK, risk assessments, security planning, post rooms, personnel security, electronic security CTV and other protective security measures.

**National Counter Terrorism Security Office.** [www.nactso.gov.uk](http://www.nactso.gov.uk)

Contains guidance and information on business continuity and resilience.

**Health and Safety Executive.** [www.hse.go.uk](http://www.hse.go.uk)

Contains guidance and information on dealing with suspect packages

**Health Protection Agency.** [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk)

Contains guidance and information on suspect packages, materials, risk assessment and radiation.

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