

<p style="text-align: center;">STATE OF VERMONT AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>INTERIM MEMO:</u> SAFE MAIL HANDLING</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Page 1 of 6</p>						
<p>Local Procedure(s) Required: Yes Applicability: All staff (including contractors and volunteers) Security Level: "B" – Anyone may have access to this document.</p>								
<p>Approved:</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; border-top: 1px solid black; width: 33%;">SIGNED</td> <td style="text-align: center; border-top: 1px solid black; width: 33%;">10-11-2018</td> <td style="text-align: center; border-top: 1px solid black; width: 33%;">10-26-2018</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Lisa Menard, Commissioner</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Date Signed</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Date Effective</td> </tr> </table>			SIGNED	10-11-2018	10-26-2018	Lisa Menard, Commissioner	Date Signed	Date Effective
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The purpose of this Interim Memo is to provide the Department of Corrections’ (DOC) staff with instruction regarding the safe handling of mail. This memo outlines practices for general mail processing, provides guidance for identifying suspicious letters or packages, and identifies specifies procedures for the handling of suspicious or threatening mail.

This Interim Memo applies to all DOC worksites, including facilities, field offices, and Central Office.

GENERAL MAIL PROCESSING PRACTICES

The following practices shall apply to the processing of mail in all DOC work sites:

1. Each site shall have a designated area to receive, inspect, and sort mail and large packages and deliveries.
 - a. To safeguard others from unwarranted exposure to harmful residual powders or chemicals, this location should be as isolated and as well ventilated as possible.
 - b. If possible, the location shall be located away from lunch rooms, break rooms, or active work areas.
 - c. If possible, the designated location should be an area that contains a sink.
 - i. If the designated location cannot be an area with a sink, it should be located as close to sink as possible.
 - d. The site manager shall designate a space that fits the above criteria to the best of the site’s abilities.
 - i. The site manager¹ shall inform the Director of Field Services or the Director of Facilities of the proposed designated location as well as the justification for choosing the proposed area.
 - ii. The Director of Field Services or the Director of Facilities shall approve or deny the proposed designated location, taking into consideration building limitations.

¹ The site manager shall be the: Superintendent, District Manager, or Commissioner.

2. All mail and packages shall be opened by a staff member in the designated area.
 - a. In Central Office, the Executive Administrative Assistant shall generally be the only staff member at Central Office who may access the Mail Room in the Waterbury State Office Complex (WSOC). The Executive Administrative Assistant may assign additional delegates the authority to access the Mail Room.
 - b. Medical packages shall be opened with a member of medical staff present.
 - c. Inmate privileged correspondence shall be the only mail that may be opened outside of the designated location unless it is flagged as suspicious after inspection.
 - i. Privileged correspondence mail shall be opened in the presence of the inmate who sent or received it.
3. All staff members shall wear gloves when opening mail.
 - a. The site manager shall ensure disposable, non-latex gloves are available to staff in the designated mail location.
 - i. In Central Office, this shall be a function of BGS.
4. The site manager shall make disposable face masks available to staff in the designated mail location, who may choose to wear them when opening mail.
 - a. These masks shall be N95 or higher-grade particulate capturing masks.
5. The site manager shall make protective eyewear available to staff in the designated mail location, who may choose to wear them when opening mail.
6. The site manager shall make Naloxone available to staff in the designated mail location.
7. All staff members shall wash their hands with soap and water immediately after handling mail.²

SUSPICIOUS MAIL

Identifying Suspicious Mail

It is important that staff members handling mail can identify a suspicious letter or package. All staff shall remain alert for signs of potentially dangerous mail and packages. Staff members shall inspect the outside of all letters and packages for indicators of suspicious mail. Indicators include:

1. Powdery substances, either felt through, or appearing on, the item;
2. Oily stains or discolorations on the exterior;
3. Strange odors;
4. Excessive packaging material (e.g., tape or string);
5. Lopsided or bulky shape of envelopes or boxes;
6. Emitting sounds, protruding wires, or exposed aluminum foil; and
7. Inappropriate or unusual labeling, such as:
 - a. Excessive postage;
 - b. No return address or strange return address;
 - c. Unusual addressing, such as not being addressed to a specific person, or the use or incorrect titles or titles with no name; or
 - d. Restrictive markings, such as “personal,” “confidential,” or “do not x-ray.”

² Do not use alcohol-based hand sanitizers or wipes – alcohol-based products may increase the skin’s absorption of fentanyl.

Procedures for Handling Suspicious or Threatening Mail

In a facility or field site:

1. When a piece of mail or a package is identified as suspicious, staff members shall not open it. The staff member shall:
 - a. Place the unopened letter or package in a red, hazardous materials bag;
 - i. The staff member should not open the mail.
 - ii. The staff member should take care to handle the mail with minimal movement and shall not sniff the mail item.
 - b. Remove the gloves and place them along with any mask worn into the hazardous materials bag;
 - i. Pinch and hold the outside of the glove near the wrist.
 - ii. Peel the glove downwards, away from the wrist, turning the glove inside out.
 - iii. Pull the glove away until it is removed from the hand.
 - iv. Hold the inside out glove with the still gloved hand.
 - v. With the ungloved hand, slide fingers under the wrist of the remaining glove, taking care not to touch the outside of the glove with bare skin.
 - vi. Peel the glove downwards, away from the wrist, turning the glove inside out.
 - vii. Continue to pull the glove down and over the inside-out glove being held in the hand.
 - c. Seal the bag, and mark it with the date, time, and the name of the staff member who bagged the item;
 - d. Wash hands using soap and water³;
 - e. Leave the item in the designated location and secure the door; and
 - f. Notify a supervisor.
2. The supervisor shall notify the site manager of the suspicious or threatening mail, providing as many details regarding the situation as possible.
3. The site manager shall assess the situation and if need be, immediately inform the appropriate local emergency authority⁴ and/or BGS Security.
 - a. The site manager shall use discretion to determine which local emergency authority shall be contacted, and whether BGS must be contacted.
 - b. In the case of possible contamination, the area suspected of being exposed shall be sealed off at the discretion of the site manager.
 - i. If an area must be sealed due to possible contamination, the site manager shall notify BGS.
 - ii. All areas sealed off as a result of possible contamination must be cleared by the appropriate local emergency authority, and/or BGS before normal operations in that area are resumed.
 - iii. The local emergency authority and/or BGS shall notify the site manager that the area is cleared for normal operations.

³ Do not use alcohol-based hand sanitizers or wipes – alcohol-based products may increase the skin’s absorption of fentanyl.

⁴ Local emergency authority shall include any or all of the following:

1. Local law enforcement;
2. Local fire department; and
3. Local rescue team.

1. The site manager shall inform all staff at the site that normal operations shall resume.
4. If the appropriate local emergency authority finds that the mail was not contaminated or dangerous and did not contain contraband, the mail shall be forwarded to the intended recipient, in accordance with the DOC's policy on [inmate mail](#).

In Central Office:

1. When a piece of mail or a package is identified as suspicious, staff members shall not open it. The staff member shall:
 - a. Place the unopened letter or package in a red, hazardous materials bag;
 - i. The staff member should not open the mail.
 - ii. The staff member should take care to handle the mail with minimal movement and shall not sniff or taste the mail items.
 - b. Remove the gloves and place them along with any mask worn into the hazardous materials bag;
 - i. Pinch and hold the outside of the glove near the wrist.
 - ii. Peel the glove downwards, away from the wrist, turning the glove inside out.
 - iii. Pull the glove away until it is removed from the hand.
 - iv. Hold the inside out glove with the still gloved hand.
 - v. With the ungloved hand, slide fingers under the wrist of the remaining glove, taking care not to touch the outside of the glove with bare skin.
 - vi. Peel the glove downwards, away from the wrist, turning the glove inside out.
 - vii. Continue to pull the glove down and over the inside-out glove being held in the hand.
 - c. Seal the bag, and mark it with the date, time, and the name of the staff member who bagged the item;
 - d. Wash hands using soap and water⁵; and
 - e. Notify a supervisor.
2. The supervisor shall notify the site manager of the suspicious or threatening mail, providing as many details regarding the situation as possible.
3. The site manager shall assess the situation and if need be, immediately inform the appropriate local emergency authority and BGS.

Discovery of Powder or Other Suspicious Substances

In cases when a suspicious powder or unknown substance is discovered during inspection:

1. All staff members who did not come in contact with the mail shall:
 - a. Vacate the area;
 - b. Wash their hands with soap and water⁶; and
 - c. Await further instructions from local first responders, unless performing lifesaving measures.
2. All staff members who did come in contact with the mail shall be isolated and remain in the area where the mail was opened and await further instructions from local emergency authority.

⁵ Do not use alcohol-based hand sanitizers or wipes – alcohol-based products may increase the skin's absorption of fentanyl.

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3. The supervisor shall make a list of all people who came in contact with the powder or unknown substance and provide the list to local emergency authority.
4. The supervisor shall notify local emergency authority and BGS of the spill.
 - a. The area shall not be cleaned until local emergency authority and BGS have assessed the situation.
 - i. The area may ultimately be cleaned, once cleared by BGS by: trained inmate workers⁷, BGS staff, or another contracted cleaning service.
5. DOC staff shall not dispose of suspicious or contaminated mail; the mail shall be disposed of by the local emergency authority or BGS.

Threatening Mail

In cases when a piece of mail is received that contains a threat (direct or indirect), the staff member who discovered it shall refer to the DOC's policy regarding [threats on staff](#).

Procedures for Documenting Suspicious or Threatening Mail

For all mail flagged as suspicious or threatening:

1. In a facility:
 - a. The supervisor shall document the suspicious mail with an incident report, in accordance with the DOC's policy on [incident reporting](#).
 - i. If the mail was threatening, the supervisor shall scan a copy into OMS and attach it to the incident report.
 - ii. Once scanned into OMS, the supervisor shall dispose of the threatening mail, unless the mail is to be turned over to local law enforcement as evidence.
 - b. If determined to be threatening, contaminated by a substance, or contain contraband, the mail shall be logged in the contraband log in accordance with the DOC's policy on [contraband](#).
2. In a field site:
 - a. The supervisor shall document the suspicious mail with an incident report, in accordance with the DOC's policy on [incident reporting](#).
 - i. If the mail was threatening, the supervisor shall scan a copy into OMS and attach it to the incident report.
 - ii. Once scanned into OMS, the supervisor shall dispose of the threatening mail, unless the mail is to be turned over to local law enforcement as evidence.
3. In Central Office:
 - a. The supervisor shall document the suspicious mail with an incident report, in accordance with Agency of Human Services (AHS) policy on [incident reporting](#).

LOCAL PROCEDURES ON SAFE MAIL HANDLING

Site managers shall establish local procedures to address safe mail handling procedures within their work site, which he or she shall review annually.

The local procedure on safe mail handling procedures shall:

⁷ Inmates shall be trained by the contracted medical staff.

1. Designate a location on the facility grounds where mail and packages shall be opened;
2. Identify the local first responders that should be contacted whenever a suspicious powder or unknown substance are discovered; and
 - a. The local procedure shall include the best method of contacting the local first responders.
3. Be reviewed and approved by Central Office.