

What to look for



bomb threats and suspect packages



Dudley
Metropolitan Borough Council

for more information please contact the
contingency and disaster management team on
01384 811552

Introduction

While emergency situations may be extremely rare, it is important we feel confident about how to respond to them.

It is highly unlikely that people will ever have to react to bomb threats, postal bombs or suspect packages – they are very rare events.

However, knowing how to react in the right way could be a life saver.

This leaflet offers information and advice on how best to react to these kinds of emergencies.

Bombs and suspect packages

Bombs are designed to have a number of devastating effects.

These are to either:

- cause an explosion (a bomb blast) that will create a loss of life or cause serious injury and damage to property.
- cause a fire (the blast/incendiary) that does the same as the above but also intends to create a major fire and structural damage.
- cause contamination (dirty bomb). This is an explosive device intended to spread contamination to people who are exposed.
- cause disruption (hoax or threat). This is designed to cause as much disruption as possible. The hoax or threat may be delivered by telephone, fax, email or by post.

What to look out for in bombs and suspect packages

- letter and parcel bombs may have excessive stamps. A bomber rarely posts a parcel over the counter as they would need to deal face to face with a postal worker.
- the return address may be fictitious or non-existent.
- the postmark may show a different location than the return address.

Other characteristics

Suspect packages could feel rigid, or appear uneven or lopsided, or have an irregular shape, soft spots or bulges. It may also seem heavy for its size. The weight distribution may be uneven or the contents may be rigid in a flexible envelope.

Meanwhile letter bombs could be marked “Personal” or “Private” or “FAO”. This is particularly important if the addressee does not usually receive personal mail at the office. They may also have protruding wires, aluminium foil, oil stains and may emit an odour of marzipan or almonds.

Parcel bombs may be unprofessionally wrapped with more than one combination of tape used to secure the package. They may be endorsed with “fragile” or “handle with care”. Parcel bombs, as with letter bombs, may have protruding wires, aluminium foil, oil stains and have a strange smell.

The addressee may receive a package from a foreign country when it is not expected.

If there are signs of white powder (suspected anthrax) isolate the package. Do not put the article in water or a confined space such as a desk, drawer or cabinet and evacuate the immediate area and call 999 / 112.

What to do if you become suspicious of a package

- do not attempt to open the parcel.
- isolate the suspect package and evacuate the immediate area.
- do not put the article in water or in a confined space, such as a desk, drawer or cabinet.
- if possible, shut windows in the immediate area.

The person that calls 999 / 112 should ask for the police and be prepared to give the following information:

- has the package been opened?
- why is it suspicious?
- who is it addressed to?
- is the person or organisation significant?
- what was the method of delivery?
- was the package expected?
- is it one of a series?
- what police enquiries have been made (if any) to date?
- what does the package look like?
- does the package smell?
- is there a significant postal date or country of origin?

While it is important to be alert for suspicious letters and parcels you must also bear in mind that a mail bomb is an extremely rare occurrence. Put in perspective, the Royal Mail process vast numbers of mail every day and has to investigate only a very small percentage of these.

What to do if you receive a telephone bomb threat

If you receive a telephone bomb threat you can help the police and potentially save lives by following these simple steps:

- stay calm.
- note telephone number if caller display exists.
- note details of the conversation and write down any code words if used.
- notify your line manager/deputy who will decide on the appropriate course of action to be taken.
- remain available to speak to the police.

Remember, whether real or hoax, making a telephone bomb threat is a criminal offence which will be recorded and investigated by the police.