

Maverick Safety Matters

Environmental Health & Safety

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Procedures for Handling Suspicious Mail

By Merja Karwoski, Biological Safety Specialist

All persons should take appropriate steps to protect themselves and others from exposure to harmful chemicals and biological agents, radiation, or bombs by following these guidelines for recognizing and handling suspicious packages and letters.

The following guidelines have been adapted specifically for the University of Texas at Arlington from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov) and the United States Postal Services (www.usps.gov).

Some threats that may be encountered include:

Chemical threats: Any substance designed or intended to cause death or serious bodily injury through the release, dissemination, or impact of toxic or poisonous chemicals, or their precursors, such as mustard gas, nerve agents, and sarin gas. Ricin also belongs to this threat category. To have negative health effects, this toxin must be injected, inhaled, or ingested. Ricin can be used as toxic dust.

Biological threats: Any substance involving a disease organism, such as smallpox, botulinum toxin, or anthrax. Anthrax is a bacterial disease caused by *Bacillus anthracis*. This organism must be rubbed into abraded skin, swallowed, or inhaled as a fine, aerosolized mist. Anthrax is not spread from one person to another person.

Radiological threats: Any substance designed to release radiation.

Package Bombs (Explosives): Package bombs usually target specific individuals. Placed bombs, however, are generally intended to disrupt workplaces and injure indiscriminately. Bomb threats may target either individuals or organizations.

How to Identify Suspicious Packages and Letters

Some characteristics of suspicious packages and letters are listed below. A copy of the suspicious mail or packages poster shown to the left can be found at:

www.usps.com/cpim/ftp/posters/pos84.pdf

- Excessive postage
- Handwritten or poorly typed addresses with no return address or one that you cannot confirm as legitimate
- Incorrect titles
- Title, but no name / incorrect title
- Misspellings of common words
- Marked with restrictive endorsements, such as "Personal" or "Confidential"
- Marked with any threatening language
- Shows a city or state in the postmark that does not match the return address
- Oily stains, discolorations or odor



- Excessive weight
- Lopsided or uneven envelope, lumpy in appearance
- Protruding wires or aluminum foil
- Excessive security material, such as masking tape, string, etc.
- Visual distractions (marked Rush, Fragile, etc.)
- Ticking sound
- Powdery substance on the outside

SUSPICIOUS UNOPENED LETTER OR PACKAGE PROCEDURE:

- Do not shake or empty the contents of any suspicious envelope or package.
- Do not carry the package or envelope, show it to others, or allow others to examine it.

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Protecting Employees from Heat Stress

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Exposure to heat can cause illness and death. The most serious heat illness is heat stroke. Other heat illnesses, such as heat exhaustion, heat cramps and heat rash, can also be dangerous. OSHA provides some basic facts and suggestions for avoiding heat-related illnesses:

Risk Factors for Heat Illness

- High temperature and humidity, direct sun exposure, no breeze or wind
- Low liquid intake; previous heat illnesses
- Heavy physical labor
- Waterproof clothing
- No recent exposure to hot workplaces

Symptoms of Heat Exhaustion

- Headache, dizziness, or fainting
- Weakness and wet skin
- Irritability or confusion
- Thirst, nausea, or vomiting

Symptoms of Heat Stroke are more serious.

The person may be confused, unable to think clearly, pass out, collapse, or have seizures. They may stop sweating.

How To Protect Yourself and Others

- Know signs/symptoms of heat illnesses; monitor yourself; use a buddy system.
- Block out direct sun and other heat sources.
- Drink plenty of fluids. Drink often and BEFORE you are thirsty. (at least one pint of water per hour)
- Avoid beverages containing alcohol or caffeine.
- Wear lightweight, light-colored, loosefitting clothes.
- Be aware that poor physical condition, some health problems (such as high blood pressure or diabetes), pregnancy, colds and flu, and some medications can increase your personal risk. If you are under treatment, ask your healthcare provider.

See Heat Illness on page 4 . . .



How to Handle Suspicious Mail *(continued from page 1)*

- Put the package or envelope on a stable surface (do not sniff, touch, taste, or look closely at it) and cover the envelope or package with anything at hand (clothing, paper, trash can, etc.)
- Alert others in the area about the suspicious package or envelope. Leave the room, close any doors, and take actions to prevent others from entering the area. If possible, shut off the ventilation system.
- Wash hands with soap and water to prevent spreading potentially infectious material to face or skin. Seek additional instructions for exposed or potentially exposed persons.
- Call the UT Arlington Police Department (UTAPD) at 817-272-3003 and the Environmental Health & Safety office (EH&S) at 817-272-2185.
- If possible, create a list of persons who were in the room or area when this suspicious letter or package was identified and a list of anyone else who may have handled the package or letter. Give this list to the UTAPD.

ENVELOPE WITH POWDER OR POWDER SPILLS OUT OF PACKAGE:

- Do not try to clean up powder.
- Do not carry the package or envelope, show it to others, or allow others to examine it.
- Cover the contents immediately with anything at hand (e.g., clothing, paper, trash can, etc.) and do not remove this cover.
- Wash hands with soap and water to prevent spreading any powder.
- Call UTAPD at 817-272-3003 and EH&S at 817-272-2185.
- Individuals who have had direct contact with the powder will be taken to the nearest restroom to remove contaminated clothing. These individuals will be furnished with disposable coveralls. The contaminated clothing should be sealed in a plastic bag and given to UTAPD or EH&S responders for proper handling.
- Individuals who have had direct contact with the powder should shower with soap and water as soon as possible. No bleach or other disinfectant should be used on skin!

Ergonomics for the Workplace

Ergonomics is defined as “human engineering.” Ergonomic assessment is a physical therapist's or other specialist's evaluation of a workplace and its furnishings, tools, and tasks in relation to the physical abilities of the worker.

The evaluation is used to identify and report any risk factors that the worker may encounter. By identifying those risks for injury and physical stress, the evaluator provides recommendations for modified design and practice. This assessment and its implementation can help make the work environment safer and more physically efficient. It will also help reduce injuries and related expenses while improving the well-being, productivity, and morale of employees.

To reduce stress and prevent fatigue, it is important to take mini-breaks throughout the day. If possible, change tasks at least once per hour. Stretch your arms, neck and legs often if you do the same type of work for long periods of time.

For a quick pick-me-up, breathe deeply several times by inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. In addition, always try to eat lunch somewhere other than your desk.

Stress-Relieving Exercises

Head and Neck Stretch

- Slowly turn head to the left, hold it for three seconds.
- Slowly turn head to the right, hold it for three seconds.
- Drop your chin towards your chest, then tilt it back as fast as you can.
- Repeat these steps five to ten times.

Shoulder Roll

- Roll your shoulders forward then backward using a circular motion.

Upper Back Stretch

- Grasp one arm below the elbow and gently pull towards the other shoulder.
- Hold this position for five seconds then repeat with the other arm.

Wrist Wave

- With your arms extended in front of you, raise and lower your hands several times.

Finger Stretch

- Make fists with your hands and hold tight for one second, then spread your fingers wide for five seconds.

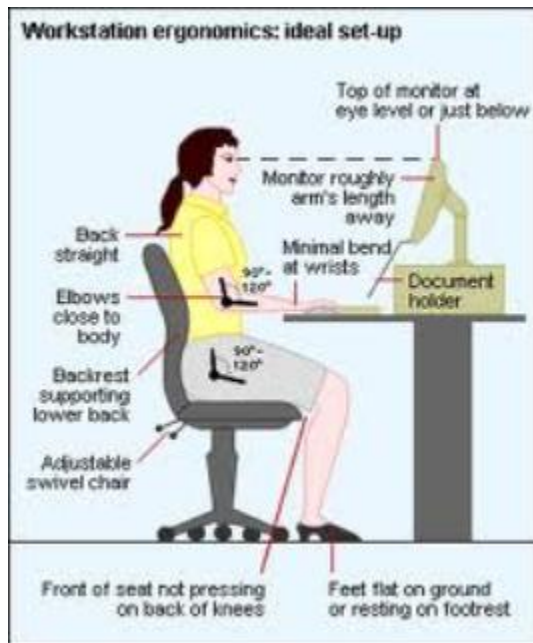
Arrangement of Your Workstation

The following recommendations will assist in ensuring employee comfort through proper workstation setup.

Work Posture

Your seating position at work is important to your comfort and safety. To reduce the painful effects of an awkward workstation, follow these tips when working with computers and keyboards:

- Make sure your chair is adjusted to provide adequate support to your back.
- Place your feet flat on the floor or on a footrest.
- Lower legs should be approximately vertical and thighs should be approximately horizontal.



- The majority of your weight should be on the buttocks.

- Ensure that there is at least 1 inch of clearance between the top of your thighs and the bottom of your desk or table.

- Keep your wrists in a neutral or straight position; your wrists should not rest on the edge of the desk.

Equipment Setup

By properly arranging your equipment you can help reduce the harmful effects of repetitive motion. The following tips

will assist with arrangement of office equipment:

Lighting

- Position computer screens, draperies, blinds and pictures to reduce glare during work hours (e.g., set computer screen at right angle).

Computer Monitor

- Computer monitor images should be clear and well defined. Adjust the screen's brightness, contrast and display size to meet your needs. If a screen flickers or jumps, have it repaired or replaced.

Ergonomics continued on page 4 . . .

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Check out
EH&S on
Facebook
to keep up
with all our
events &
training:

[UT Arlington
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Health & Safety
Office](#)

Severe Weather Preparation is Key to Survival

Most people do not have a weather radio that will wake them at 2:00 AM when a tornado is headed toward their county. WFAA Channel 8 is offering a service that tracks severe weather by zip code, then calls your cell phone and sends you an e-mail when it is near. There is a \$10.00 fee for the program, and you can sign up at the link below:

<http://special.wfaa.com/weathercall/>

If you're asleep and get a warning that a tornado is approaching your location, get up and go to a safe place in your dwelling. Visit the links below for instructions on what essential items to keep handy if you know severe weather is predicted for your area (clothes, medications, etc.)

www.ready.gov/america/getakit/index.html

www.redcross.org/portal/site/en/menuitem

Ergonomic Tips *(continued from page 3)*

- Place the monitor 20-28 inches away from your face. The center of the computer screen should be approximately 15-25 degrees below your line of vision.

Keyboards

- Position computer keyboards so that the angle between the forearm and upper arm is between 80-120 degrees.
- Place the keyboard in an area that is accessible and comfortable.

Wrist support

- Use wrist supports made of padded material. The wrist supports should allow you to type without bending your wrists.

Telephones

Neck tension is a common problem caused by holding the telephone between the head and neck. The following tip may help to offset the neck tension caused by this position:

- Use a headset or speaker phone if you are on the telephone for extended period of times.

Please call our office if you have any ergonomic questions or need assistance setting up a work station.

- Information for this article was obtained from the UT System Office of Risk Management website.

Heat Illness *(continued from page 2)*

What to Do When a Worker is Ill from the Heat

- Call a supervisor for help. If the supervisor is not available, call 911. Someone should stay with the worker until help arrives.
- Move the worker to a cooler/shaded area.
- Remove outer clothing.
- Fan and mist the worker with water; apply ice (ice bags or ice towels), especially at the neck.
- Provide cool drinking water, if able to drink.

IF THE WORKER IS NOT ALERT or seems confused, this may be a heat stroke. CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY and apply ice as soon as possible.

See the [OSHA Quick Card](#) guide for more information.

EH&S TRAINING COURSES

The following training courses are available online through the Research Profiles system at www.uta.edu/ra/real/loginscreen :

Hazard Communication Training
Bloodborne Pathogens Training

Radiation Awareness Training
Laser Safety Training

Defensive Driving Course (DDC) This course must be completed every 3 years to remain an authorized driver of UTA vehicles. DPS driving record checks must be renewed annually.

15-Passenger Van Training: Take the online course first. A hands-on driving test is also required and will be conducted at 2:00 p.m. on the dates below. Call ext. 2-2185 to register ahead of time (maximum class size is 8). Meet at the EH&S office, 500 Summit Ave. Drivers must have already taken the Defensive Driving Course and have a current driving record check to attend.

August 18 (Thurs.) Sept. 13 (Tues.) Oct. 18 (Tues.)

Call us at ext. 2-2185 to schedule other required training available through our office:

Radioactive Material/Laser User
Shipping Infectious Materials

BioSafety Level II
Hot Work Safety

Lift Truck
Lockout/Tagout

Respirator

Fire Extinguisher Training will be provided for groups by request. Please call 2-2185 to schedule.



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