

# Information on Suspicious Packages



October 12, 2001

Due to the Anthrax cases in Florida and concerns regarding potential biological or chemical threats, awareness among the public and law enforcement is heightened. Law enforcement agencies and fire departments statewide have received numerous requests for information and for assistance in picking up suspicious packages or letters. The information below includes data regarding the Anthrax substance, characteristics of suspicious packages and what to do if you receive a suspicious package.

## WHAT IS ANTHRAX?

Anthrax is an infectious disease caused by the spore-forming bacterium *Bacillus anthracis*. Anthrax is very rare in humans and cannot be transmitted from person to person. It can appear as a crystalline or powdery substance that may or may not be seen.

*Bacillus anthracis* is an age-old bacterium that has caused disease for centuries in the world. Infection comes from contact with anthrax-infected animals or infected animal products. The spores are found widely in soil; therefore, animals that feed on the ground tend to be those most likely infected. These animals usually include cows, sheep and goats. Humans can contract one of three forms of *Bacillus anthracis*: cutaneous (skin), intestinal and respiratory.

Most commonly, infected people have been exposed through their work such as farmers, butchers and veterinarians, and those who sort raw wool and tan hides. Symptoms vary depending on exposure but can include cold and flu-type symptoms. Doctors can prescribe antibiotics for treatment of the disease. To be effective, treatment should be initiated early. If left untreated, the disease can be fatal.

## WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUSPICIOUS PACKAGE?

The likelihood of receiving a package or letter containing suspicious substances is remote. However, it is important for citizens to be aware of characteristics that are common to suspicious packages. Some indicators include, but are not limited to, the following ([click here for diagram](#)):

- ★ Mailed from a Foreign Country
- ★ Excessive Postage
- ★ Misspelled Words
- ★ Addressed to Title Only
- ★ Wrong Title with Name
- ★ Rigid or Bulky
- ★ Badly Typed or Hand Written
- ★ Restrictive Markings
- ★ No Return Address
- ★ Strange Odor
- ★ Lopsided/Protruding item
- ★ Stains on Wrapping

## WHAT DO I DO IF I RECEIVE A SUSPICIOUS PACKAGE?

- ★ Leave the letter or package alone. Do not move the item.
- ★ The individual in contact with the letter should leave the vicinity immediately.
- ★ Other individuals within the vicinity of the letter should also leave immediately.
- ★ Contact your local law enforcement agency and explain what has occurred.
- ★ Your local law enforcement agency will notify the county health department and the Department of Health to conduct appropriate testing.
- ★ Results of the test will be available in time to determine what, if any, treatment should be implemented.
- ★ Individuals who open or have contact with the letter or package containing an unknown substance should thoroughly wash their hands with soap and water.
- ★ There is no need to start antibiotics prior to the analysis of the letter or package.
- ★ Contact information of all individuals that may have been exposed should be collected immediately. These individuals should be reassured that they will be contacted as soon as results are known.

Sources: Center for Disease Control, U.S. Postal Service, Florida Department of Health, Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

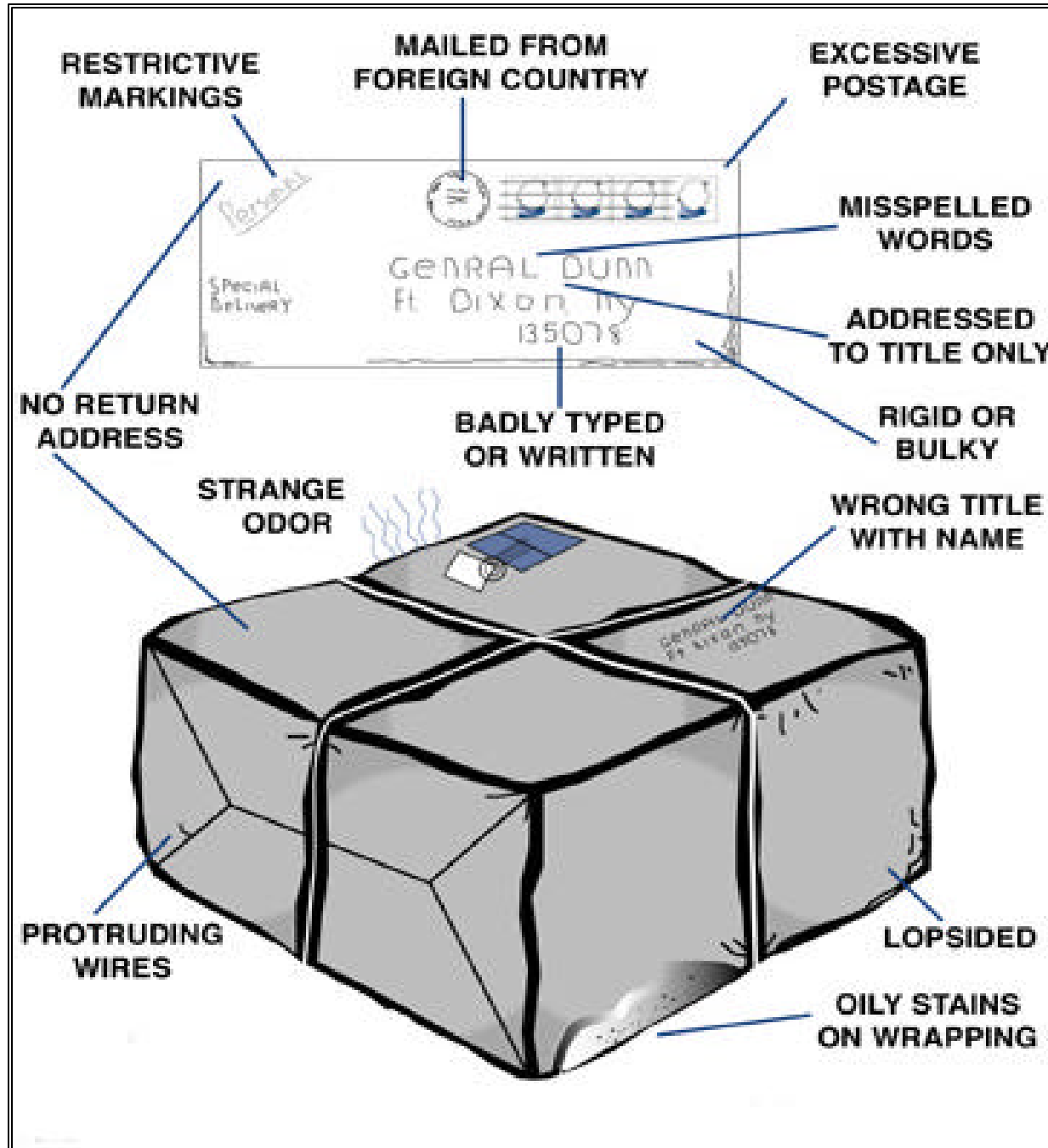
**For Public Dissemination**

# Information on Suspicious Packages



October 12, 2001

Some of these characteristics are provided in the illustration below.



Sources: Center for Disease Control, U.S. Postal Service, Florida Department of Health, Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

**For Public Dissemination**