

February 28, 2002

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CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER AND EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

SUZANNE F. MEDVIDOVICH  
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, HUMAN RESOURCES

SUBJECT: Management Advisory – Review of the Postal Service’s Communication of Employee Safety and Health Issues at Selected Locations  
(Report Number LH-MA-02-002)

This self-initiated management advisory presents the results of our review of the Postal Service’s communication of the anthrax threat to Postal Service employees and actions being taken to ensure employees’ safety and health (Project Number 02YG001LH000). We conducted fieldwork at selected locations within the Capital Metro Area. Our background, objective, scope, methodology, and locations visited are discussed in Appendix A.

## **Results**

We commend the communication efforts, safety, and corrective actions taken by the Postal Service. On the basis of the sites we visited, we concluded the Postal Service communicated an extensive amount of information received from health experts and took several actions to ensure employees’ safety and health. Additionally, the Postal Service has initiated worksite evaluations, which we believe will further protect employees and provide an approach to addressing any future bioterrorist attacks.

**Communication to Employees.** The Postal Service established a National Operation Center at headquarters, which disseminated health and safety information about anthrax to Postal Service officials nationwide. These officials then provided information to area and district offices that in turn disseminated it down to employees in a variety of ways that included:

- Safety talks
- Videos
- Visits by public health officials
- Internet/Intranet

The Postal Service continues to communicate new and updated information as it is received, although the volume and frequency of the information has decreased significantly.

**Safety Actions.** Responding to concerns pertaining to anthrax has been the Postal Service's top priority since early October 2001 when officials became aware that this biologically hazardous material was processed through the Postal Service system. Postal Service officials have been, and remain, in consultation with federal, state, and local safety, health, and medical experts to identify and implement measures to reduce employees' potential exposure to anthrax. In addition, based on recommendations from health experts, the Postal Service has purchased personal protective equipment and other items to provide protection from exposure to anthrax. This includes the nationwide distribution of impermeable gloves and respirators approved by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. The Postal Service also prohibited the use of compressed air for cleaning machinery, and is currently in the process of purchasing high-efficiency particulate air filter vacuum cleaners for many facilities.

**Worksite Evaluations.** On October 31, 2001, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a Health Advisory titled, CDC Interim Recommendations for Protecting Workers from Exposure to Bacillus Anthracis in Work Sites Where Mail is Handled or Processed. It recommended that Postal Service safety personnel conduct worksite evaluations of jobs, tasks, and operations encompassing work at all facilities.<sup>1</sup> The Health Advisory was provided to assist safety personnel with developing a comprehensive program to protect workers from anthrax and provided a long-term approach to addressing future instances of bio-terrorist attacks. On December 11, 2001, we discussed the results of our audit work with Postal Service officials at headquarters and recommended they follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Health Advisory to conduct worksite evaluations to determine what measures would be appropriate to protect employees from future threats of anthrax.

**Corrective Actions Taken.** Based on our recommendation, the Postal Service began actions to conduct worksite evaluations. Specifically, on December 18, 2001, plans were initiated to conduct evaluations of Postal Service facilities. A Postal Service official told us worksite evaluations should be completed by April 2002 with a final report issued by May 2002. The report will:

- Determine Risk. Classify the risk to Postal Service employees by operations or tasks using the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's Risk Reduction

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<sup>1</sup> Postal Service facilities are described as post offices, mail distribution/handling centers, bulk mail centers, airmail facilities, priority mail processing centers, public and private mailrooms, and other settings in which workers are responsible for the handling and processing of mail.

Matrix. This matrix was developed to offer basic advice and suggest protective measures to reduce the risk of exposure of anthrax in the workplace.

- Identify Existing and Additional Control Measures. Identify the existing control measures that will protect Postal Service employees from anthrax or other bio-terrorism agents and additional control measures, if any, that will further reduce potential exposure.
- Identify and Rank Bio-terrorism Agents. Rank bio-terrorism agents in terms of likelihood of dissemination via the mail.

Postal Service officials also told us they will coordinate their efforts with experts in health and safety agencies. Because the Postal Service has engaged in these activities and they meet the intent of our early recommendation to them, there are no recommendations in this report.

### **Management's Comments**

Management said that the Postal Service would continue to work to provide all employees a safe working environment and communicate essential matters to protect them from future attacks from anthrax or any other bioterrorist hazards. Management comments, in their entirety, are included in Appendix B of this report.

### **Evaluation of Management's Comments**

Management's comments are responsive and address the issues identified in the report.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies provided by your staff during the review. If you have any questions, please contact Chris Nicoloff, director, Labor Management, at 214-775-9114, or me at (703) 248-2300.

Ronald K. Stith  
Assistant Inspector General  
for Core Operations

Attachment

cc: John A. Rapp  
Richard J. Strasser, Jr.  
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## **APPENDIX A**

### **BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY**

#### Background

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, on behalf of the Department of Health and Human Services, is responsible for providing national leadership in the public health and medical communities to prevent illnesses, including those that could occur as a result of bio-terrorism. In addition, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration is involved in the anthrax crisis because their mission is to save lives, prevent injuries, and protect the health of America's workers. At the time of our audit, neither the Occupational Safety and Health Administration nor the Postal Service had mandated the use of personal protection equipment by employees. Instead, the use of such equipment was voluntary for employees, based on information provided to them by Postal Service officials who received the information from various health experts.

In a November 13, 2001, letter to the Chairman, Committee on Appropriations, United States Senate, the postmaster general, John E. Potter, stated that the Postal Service has spent \$16.8 million for protection from anthrax such as gloves and masks, and identified \$33.2 million as the total amount needed to purchase protective equipment for employees.

On October 4, 1999, the Postal Service published Emergency Response to Mail Allegedly Containing Anthrax, Management Instruction EL-860-1999-3, which prescribes actions that should be taken to effectively deal with mail allegedly containing anthrax. Further, the March 12, 2001, Management Instruction, Personal Protective Equipment and Respiratory Protection Programs, states that the Postal Service is required to conduct a hazard assessment of the workplace to determine if hazards are present, or are likely to be present, that necessitate the use of personal protective equipment to protect employees from hazards, including anthrax, to the eyes, face, and head.

#### Objective, Scope, and Methodology

Our overall objective was to evaluate the Postal Service's communication of the anthrax threat and policies and procedures to address the threat throughout the Postal Service and actions taken to ensure employees' safety and health. Specifically, we were to determine if the Postal Service:

1. Effectively and sufficiently communicated issues related to biological hazardous material throughout the Postal Service.
2. Took effective actions to protect employees' safety and health.

3. Had policies and procedures in place to address the threat.

We are addressing sub-objectives 1 and 2 in this report. We will address sub-objective 3 in another report.

To evaluate the effectiveness and sufficiency of the communication of issues related to biological hazardous material, we gathered data from headquarters and the nine area offices to obtain an understanding of the information sent out to the field, facilities, and employees. We obtained copies of email messages, fact sheets, safety videos, and congressional statements. We also reviewed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Interim Recommendations for Protecting Workers from Exposure to Anthrax in Work Sites where Mail is Handled or Processed, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's Workplace Anthrax Exposure Guidance. We visited safety and health experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia, to discuss their recommendations and also contacted safety officials from the Occupational Safety and Health Organization to further discuss safety measures related to protecting employees from anthrax exposure.

To identify the effectiveness of actions to protect employees' safety and health actions, we selected five facilities within the Capital Metro Area and judgmentally conducted interviews with employees. We visited three processing facilities (Merrifield, Dulles, and Baltimore) and two stations (Friendship and Southwest). All five facilities were previously tested for anthrax in the workplace and results from the three processing facilities were negative but the two stations tested positive. At the time of our visit to the stations, the sites had been cleaned and declared clear of anthrax.

We also conducted interviews with safety personnel at headquarters and reviewed Postal Service's documentation on the Interim Guidelines for Sampling, Analysis, Decontamination, and Disposal of Anthrax for U.S. Postal Service Facilities, and the Management Instruction EL-860-1999-3; Emergency Response to Mail Allegedly Containing Anthrax, dated October 4, 1999.

We conducted our review from November 2001 to February 2002, in accordance with the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency, Quality Standards for Inspections.

## APPENDIX B. MANAGEMENT'S COMMENTS

SUZANNE F. MEDVIDOVICH  
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT  
HUMAN RESOURCES



February 19, 2002

RONALD K. STITH

SUBJECT: Transmittal of Draft Management Advisory—Review of the Postal Service's  
Communication of Employee Safety and Health Issues at Selected Locations  
(Report Number Anthrax Audit Report LH-MA-02-DRAFT)

We appreciate your meeting with us on December 11, 2001, to discuss your draft report regarding employee safety and health issues with anthrax. We have no further comments beyond those we transmitted on the draft during the meeting and in writing.

We will continue to work to provide all employees a safe working environment and communicate essential matters to protect them from future attacks from anthrax or any other bioterrorist hazards.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Suzanne Medvidovich".

Suzanne F. Medvidovich

cc: Mr. Donahoe