

United States Postal Service  
-Lessons in Crisis Communication-

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Annette Davidson shuffled her papers into a manila folder, grabbed her coffee, and checked her watch. It was 7:15a.m. and time for her meeting with the senior management at the United States Postal Service. Annette worked for a large business communication consulting company that specialized in executive management communication services. Today's meeting with the Postmaster General and members of the Board of Governors would be the fourth this week and today was only Wednesday. Things had really kicked into high gear since the anthrax had been detected in the mail system last week and Annette was called in to assist the Postal Service management team in dealing with the continually evolving crisis.

As Annette walked briskly towards the conference room, she reviewed the agenda in her mind. She entered the room and found an empty seat as Wade Holmes stepped up to the podium to make the morning announcements. "This morning," Wade started, "I want to begin with new updates on the symptoms of anthrax infection, information on a possible new case of inhalation anthrax infection in New York, and where we currently stand on the identification of a suspect(s)."

Annette sighed; this was definitely going to be another long day.\*

## **HISTORY**

In the more than two centuries since the United States Postal Service began, it has grown and changed with America. Discovering the history of the Postal Service is a journey into the history of transportation, economics, industrialization, communications and government. The USPS represents an industry that drives American commerce; and still provides universal service for every family in the nation.

Since its crude beginnings in 1639, the Postal Service has had a colorful history. When Benjamin Franklin was appointed the first Postmaster General in 1753, there were only a handful of post offices. Today, with over 38,000 post offices, 800,000 employees, and a yearly budget of more than \$35 million dollars, the USPS has become one of the world's largest organizations.

The internal organizational structure of the Postal Service has also changed over the years. Early on, the Postmaster General was appointed by the President. The Post Office Department was transformed into the United States Postal Service, an independent establishment of the executive branch of the Government of the United States, on July 1, 1971, when the Postmaster General ceased to be a member of the President's cabinet. The Board of Governors was established by the Postal Reorganization Act and includes nine Governors who are appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate. The nine Governors select a Postmaster General, who becomes a member of the Board, and those ten select a Deputy Postmaster General, who also serves on the Board.

The mission of the Postal Service, as stated in Title 39 of the U.S. Code, is: The Postal Service shall have as its basic function the obligation to provide postal services to bind the Nation together through the personal, educational, literary, and business correspondence of the people. It shall provide prompt, reliable, and efficient services to patrons in all areas and shall render postal services to all communities.<sup>1</sup>

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\* Introduction scenario not based on any actual events.

## **OCTOBER 2001**

On September 11, 2001, terrorists attacked the United States, killing thousands. The Postal Service helped keep the lines of communication open despite severe restrictions on commercial air operations during this tragic time.

In the days, weeks, and months following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks in New York and Washington D.C., there was an intense climate of uneasiness and panic in America. American citizens were consumed with grief over the unprecedented tragedy and were wondering what might happen next. In October 2001, barely 3 weeks after the attacks, another wave of terror spread throughout the country. (Figure 1).

Anthrax is a rare, infectious disease caused by bacteria and is usually spread in the form of a spore. There are three forms of anthrax infection: cutaneous (skin), inhalation (lungs), and gastrointestinal (stomach and intestine). Anthrax infection can cause boils, sores, fever, fatigue, difficulty breathing, and even death. Most persons who are exposed to anthrax become ill within one week of exposure.<sup>2</sup>

On October 5, 2001, a photo editor in Florida died from inhalation anthrax. A week later, a media employee in New York City was diagnosed with cutaneous anthrax after opening a letter addressed to an NBC anchorman. On October 15<sup>th</sup>, a letter containing anthrax was delivered to the Capitol Hill office of a U.S. Senator. On October 21<sup>st</sup>, an employee at a postal facility in Washington D.C. who handled mail for Capitol Hill, was diagnosed with inhalation anthrax and died the next day. That night, an employee from the same facility died from inhalation anthrax. By October 27<sup>th</sup>, anthrax spores had been detected in other locations. In the following weeks, business and government offices closed and the country went on high alert.<sup>3</sup>

## **IMPACT ON USPS**

Crises have many different sources. Crisis, whether the result of a natural disaster (earthquakes, fire, storms, etc) or man-made (such as vandalism, acts of terror, etc.), big or small, short term or long term, is an inevitable occurrence for all organizations.

The anthrax attacks of October 2001 thrust the United States Postal Service into the media spotlight and onto the stage of public scrutiny. The entire nation watched to see how the U.S. government and the Postal Service would respond to this newest act of terror. Indeed, never before in the history of the Postal Service had a crisis of this magnitude occurred.

### *Man-made Crisis*

The Postal Service faced a very serious man-made crisis. Although it was ultimately determined that the USPS was not the intended target, terrorists were, nonetheless, using the mail system as a vehicle to perpetuate terror through the spread of a rare biological agent. Little was known about anthrax as there had been no previous cases of its use as a biological weapon against Americans.

### *Communication Scope during Crisis*

The message itself was particularly challenging to communicate due to the technical nature of the issue. Because Anthrax - its method of spread, its symptoms, prevention, and treatment - was predominantly medical in nature, the Postal Service was disadvantaged in that the agency was ill equipped to understand and communicate the dangers of anthrax. Additionally, the task of disseminating this message to all Americans was enormous. Communicating the message to business partners as well as to all 800,000 Postal Service employees also presented Postal Service management with a mammoth task of tailoring the

message to each specific stakeholder group and spreading the message through the most effective channels.

## **USPS RESPONDS**

The Postal Service wasted little time in responding to the threat of the anthrax attacks. Within a matter of hours after the CDC confirmed that a letter carrier had cutaneous anthrax, the Postal Service closed the Trenton and Brentwood postal facilities. The USPS began working diligently with government and medical agencies to determine the nature and the extent of the danger involved. The Postmaster General announced that the Postal Inspection Service was working with other law enforcement agencies on the incident in Florida. Two days after the announcement, the USPS began to educate employees nationwide on signs of anthrax exposure and procedures for handling mail to avoid anthrax infection. A week later, the agency began mailing out informational postcards to all American households (Exhibits 2 and 3) to educate the public on the signs and dangers of anthrax. Press releases issued, public appearances made, a special Mail Security Task Force created, a \$1 million dollar reward offered and extensive collaboration between the USPS and various government and media agencies were just a few of the many initial steps taken by the Postal Agency.

The 2004 GAO report gave the following account to Congress: “While noting that Postal Service officials could have taken other actions to respond to the anthrax incidents, postal union leaders nevertheless praised the Postal Service for its efforts to provide a safe work environment and to prevent future occurrences, as well as to involve them in the response and to keep employees informed. For example, in testimony delivered to the House Committee on Government Reform on October 30, 2001, two union leaders stressed that the Postal Service had acted in good faith and that its decisions were guided by the advice and recommendations it received from the medical community.”<sup>3</sup> (Exhibits 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6)

## **GAO RESPONSE**

The Government Accountability Office - the audit, evaluation, and investigative arm of Congress - exists to support Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and accountability of the federal government for the American people.

In September 2004, the GAO released publication # **GAO-04-239**, which analyzed, critiqued and reported on the USPS response to the 2001 anthrax attacks. In the report, the GAO made the following observations:

“The Postal Service communicated information to affected postal employees about the health risks posed by, and the extent of, anthrax contamination at the five facilities in our review, but problems with the accuracy, clarity, and timeliness of the information provided led employees to question the information they received. Problems with accuracy occurred because the early health risk information public health officials provided was based on their existing knowledge and experience that proved to be far more uncertain than the officials initially recognized and which resulted in underestimating the health risks to postal employees. Problems with clarity occurred because information on the medical response to anthrax contamination changed as knowledge evolved. Problems with timeliness occurred when the Postal Service delayed the release of quantitative data (anthrax spore counts) from environmental tests at one of

the five facilities. A union representative had requested this information, and the Postal Service was required to disclose it, but the Postal Service delayed disclosure in part because it was uncertain what the results meant for worker safety and public health. The Postal Service has taken steps aimed at communicating more effectively, including establishing a center to coordinate information within the postal system and working with other agencies to develop guidelines for responding to anthrax.”<sup>3</sup>

Although some preliminary problems were identified by the GAO report, the overall conclusion of the committee was that USPS handled the situation well, given the circumstances. The report also affirmed the USPS commitment to further improve its internal communication process.

## **A MATTER OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

The Postal Service understood that a polished message alone could not protect the organization’s reputation. For USPS to excel, it must follow the message with concrete action. Since the anthrax incidents, the Postal Service has twice revised its Interim Guidelines to incorporate the lessons it has learned from their response to anthrax in its facilities.

Recognizing the need to improve its communication both internally and externally, the USPS took a number of steps aimed at communicating more effectively during the fall of 2001. First, on October 16, 2001, it established a National Postal Operations Center to coordinate information within the postal system. It also created a Mail Security Task Force composed of representatives from management associations and employee unions. To improve its communications with other agencies, on October 31, 2001, the USPS established a Unified Incident Command Center with representatives from the agencies that respond to contamination in postal facilities. The USPS also worked with the National Response Team—a group of 16 federal agencies responsible for planning, preparing, and responding to the release of hazardous substances—to revise existing guidelines for responding to anthrax. Consistent with GAO recommendations, the most recent version of the guidelines, suggests that agencies (1) disclose more—rather than less—information, particularly when the release of undisclosed information could damage an agency’s credibility; (2) consider the needs of different audiences (e.g., employees, reporters, local politicians) for different types of information; (3) anticipate what information people need and in what form; and (4) admit when you do not know the information. The USPS also revised its guidance to require that facility managers communicate future test results—including quantitative results—to employees and others as quickly as possible, along with information explaining any limitations or uncertainties associated with the results.<sup>3</sup>

## **LOOKING FORWARD**

In addition to adopting new technology to help detect and prevent anthrax from moving through the mail system, the Postal Service has also improved its ability to share information.

During the anthrax response, the USPS learned more about the roles and responsibilities of key federal agencies and personnel. Postal managers now interact regularly with federal agencies, including OSHA and the EPA. In addition, postal managers meet periodically with representatives of the 16 federal agencies that make up the National Response Team. Such regular interaction has established a basis for better coordination with federal agencies than the

USPS had prior to the anthrax incidents. Internally, the USPS has centralized responsibility for any future response. The agency has created a new position; the Vice President for Emergency Preparedness, to identify a single decision maker and to ensure that one individual will be involved in all phases of planning for and responding to any future emergency. This new position signifies the importance of having communication as a core function of executive management. Additionally, the Postal Service has established a 24-hour watch desk so that when an incident occurs, a call goes directly to the desk and the Inspection Service can transmit information nationwide. The USPS can then see, track, and analyze patterns as they develop, whereas in the past such information was not available until after a report on the incident had been prepared. Having earlier information on the response also allows the Inspection Service to meet sooner with the Department of Homeland Security to discuss the issues. Finally, the USPS has established procedures for obtaining up-to-date information for contacting employees. For example, the employees are required to provide current information before their ID badges are issued. In addition, the plant orientation brochure and orientation briefing address the importance of keeping the information up to date. The USPS also posts periodic reminders and locate a kiosk within the workspace to make it easier for employees to update their contact information.

## QUESTIONS

1. Imagine yourself as an executive in a strategy planning session at USPS headquarters. Who should be present at the planning session? Describe the conversation that might occur.
2. What are the appropriate steps an organization should take to handle a crisis situation? At what point should communication occur with employees, media, and outside stakeholders?
3. Would you consider the communication strategy of USPS a success? Why or why not?
4. What made the USPS corporate communication strategy effective/ineffective?
5. What follow-up actions did USPS take that were imperative to success?
6. What are the long-term benefits to be gained from effective corporate communication?
7. Suppose that a suspect/perpetrator is identified during Wade's morning announcements. Should this information be communicated to the public? What if the perpetrator is an employee or relative of an employee of either the Postal Service or a high ranking government official – does this affect the public's right to know?
8. What if a suspect is never identified? How can USPS promote confidence in the agency?

## References

1. [www.usps.gov](http://www.usps.gov)
2. CDC Emergency Preparedness website.  
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/anthrax/needtoknow.asp>
3. 2004 GAO Report  
[www.gao.gov](http://www.gao.gov)

## Appendix

Figure 1: Date (2001), Type and Location of Anthrax Cases

Table 2: Distribution of Anthrax Cases, Fall 2001

Exhibit 1: Time Line of Key Events, Fall 2001

Exhibit 2: Example of Informational Postcard

Exhibit 3: Example of Informational Postcard (Spanish)

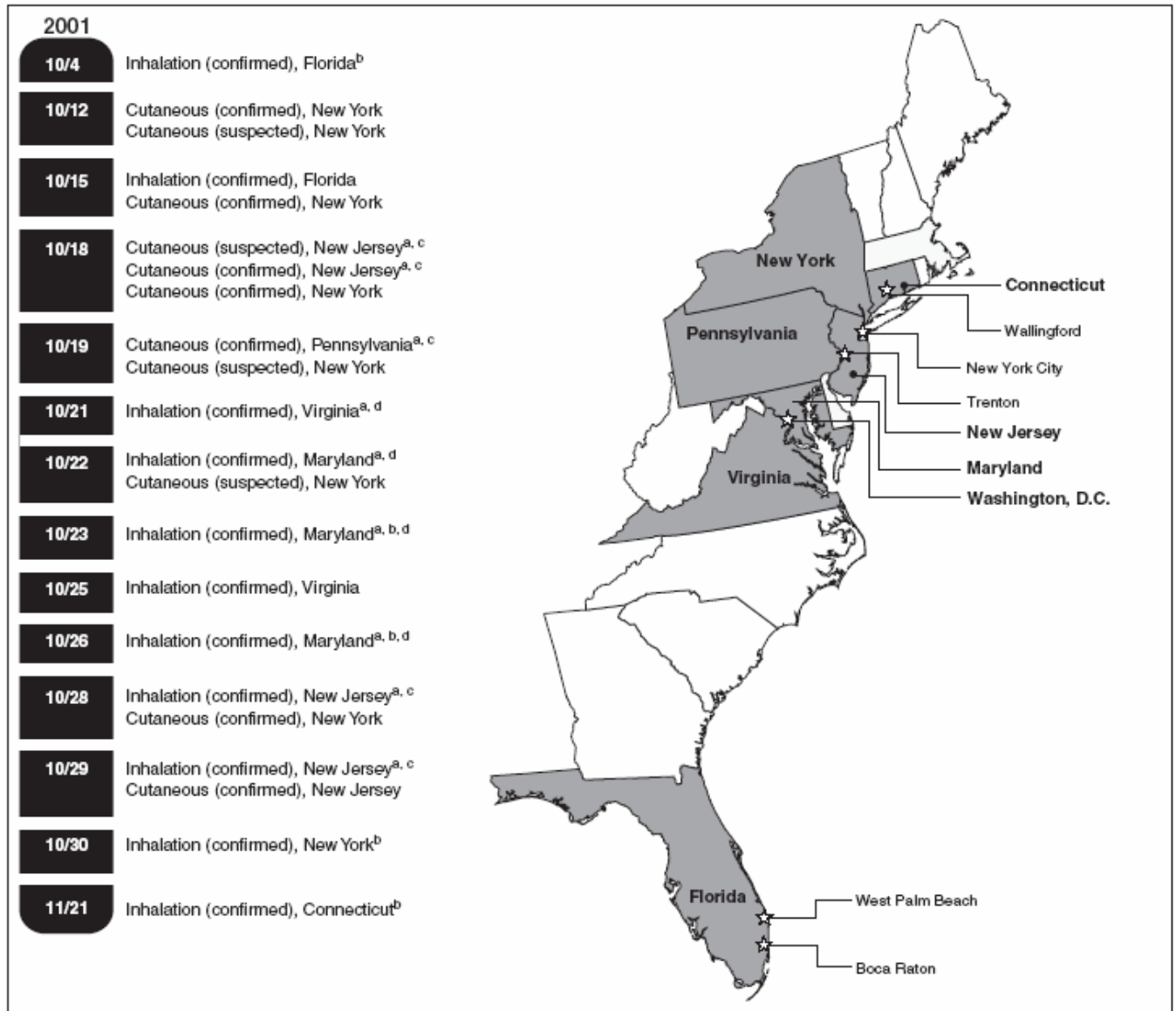
Exhibit 4: Press Release October 12, 2001

Exhibit 5: Press Release October 15, 2001

Exhibit 6: Press Release October 23, 2001

**Figure 1: Date (2001), Type and Location of Anthrax Cases**

**Figure 1: Date in 2001, Type, and Location of Anthrax Cases**



Source: GAO analysis of CDC documentation.

Note: The date reflects when CDC either (1) confirmed a case of anthrax or (2) suspected a case of anthrax that could not be confirmed.

**Table 2: Distribution of Anthrax Cases, Fall 2001**

Facility location	Number of confirmed or suspected cases	Type of anthrax and affected population			
		Cutaneous		Inhalation	
		Postal employees	Others	Postal employees	Others
Florida	2	0	0	0	2
New York	8	0	7	0	1
New Jersey	6	3	1	2	0
Washington, D.C.	5	0	0	4	1
Connecticut	1	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>

Source: GAO analysis of CDC information.

## Exhibit 1: Time Line of Key Events, Fall 2001

## Time Line of Key Events, Fall 2001

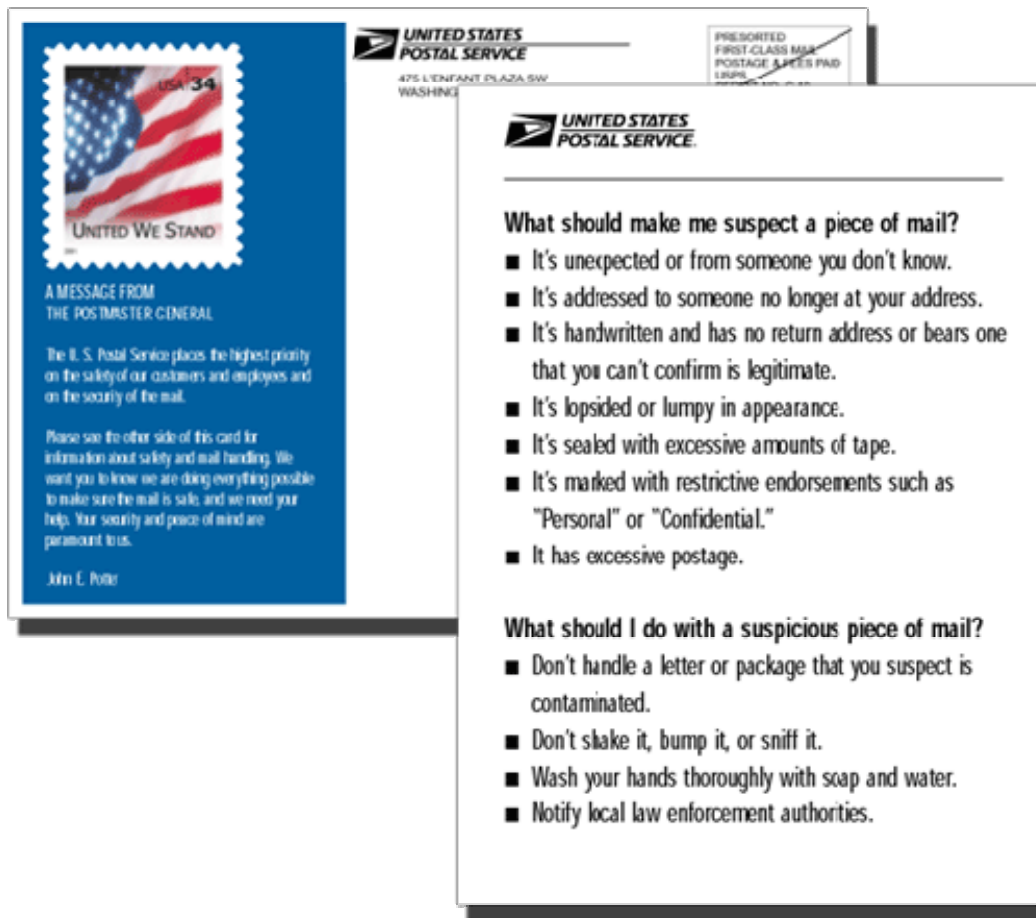
Date	Events
Tuesday, 9/11/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon heighten concerns about possible bioterrorism.</li> </ul>
Monday, 9/18/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letters containing anthrax spores are mailed to the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and the <i>New York Post</i> from Trenton, N.J.</li> </ul>
Wednesday, 9/26/01- Monday, 10/01/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two NBC employees, a <i>New York Post</i> employee, and the baby of an American Broadcasting Company (ABC) employee in New York City, and two postal employees in N.J. seek medical treatment for skin conditions.</li> <li>• In Fla., an American Media Incorporated employee is admitted to the hospital with a respiratory condition.</li> </ul>
Tuesday, 10/02/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Fla., a second American Media Incorporated employee is admitted to the hospital with a diagnosis of meningitis.</li> <li>• CDC issues an alert about bioterrorism, which provides information about preventive measures for anthrax.</li> </ul>
Thursday, 10/04/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CDC and the Fla. Department of Health announce that an American Media Incorporated employee has inhalation anthrax.</li> </ul>
Friday, 10/05/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Fla., an American Media Incorporated employee becomes the first person to die from anthrax.</li> </ul>
Monday, 10/08/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Washington, D.C., the Postmaster General announces that the Postal Inspection Service is working with other law enforcement agencies on the incident in Fla.</li> </ul>
Tuesday, 10/09/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letters containing anthrax spores are mailed to Senator Daschle and Senator Leahy from Trenton, N.J.</li> </ul>
Wednesday, 10/10/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Postal Service begins to educate employees nationwide on signs of cutaneous anthrax exposure and procedures for handling mail to avoid anthrax infection.</li> </ul>
Friday, 10/12/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In N.Y., the New York City Department of Health announces that an NBC employee has a confirmed case of cutaneous anthrax.</li> <li>• The FBI recovers the letter sent to NBC and, later that day, a public health laboratory in New York City confirms that the letter contained anthrax. However, there was insufficient sample remaining to determine the size of the anthrax particles.</li> <li>• The Postal Service says that it will offer gloves and disposable masks to all employees who handle mail.</li> <li>• Senator Daschle's letter passes through the Brentwood processing and distribution center.</li> <li>• The Boca Raton post office in Fla., which handled mail for American Media Incorporated, is tested for anthrax, and the Palm Beach County Department of Health administers nasal swabs and offers a 15-day supply of ciprofloxacin to postal employees considered most likely to have handled the mail to American Media Incorporated.</li> </ul>
Monday, 10/15/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On Capitol Hill, an employee opens an envelope that is addressed to Senator Daschle containing anthrax. Staffs in that office, an adjacent office, and first responders are given nasal swabs and a 3-day supply of antibacterial drugs.</li> <li>• In N.J., the State Department of Health and Senior Services assures Trenton employees that they have a low risk of contracting anthrax.</li> <li>• In Fla., the presence of anthrax spores is confirmed at the Boca Raton post office.</li> <li>• In Fla., CDC confirms that a second American Media Incorporated employee has inhalation anthrax.</li> <li>• U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases personnel communicate the initial results of the agency's analyses of the substance in the letter to Senator Daschle to the FBI and the CDC.</li> </ul>

Date	Events
Tuesday, 10/16/01- Wednesday, 10/17/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Washington, D.C., part of the Hart Senate Office Building is closed in the morning, and the remainder of the building is closed in the evening. Over the next 3 days, employees located in the Hart building and other Capitol Hill employees who request them are given nasal swabs and a 3-day supply of antibacterial drugs.</li> <li>• U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases personnel conduct additional analyses of the substance in the Daschle letter and communicate their generalized findings to representatives of the FBI, CDC, and selected other agencies. Representatives from the Postal Service were not present.</li> </ul>
Thursday, 10/18/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Washington, D.C., a local hazardous materials response team conducts two "quick tests" at Brentwood. The tests are negative for anthrax. A contractor begins taking additional samples for laboratory testing in the evening.</li> <li>• In Washington, D.C., the Postmaster General holds a press conference at Brentwood, in part to reassure postal employees that they are at low risk for contracting anthrax.</li> <li>• In N.J., CDC confirms cutaneous anthrax in a N.J. postal employee, and a second suspected case is identified. The Trenton facility is closed for environmental testing, and employees are sent home.</li> <li>• In N.Y., the New York City Department of Health announces another case of cutaneous anthrax in a Columbia Broadcasting System employee.</li> <li>• In Fla., the Postal Service arranges with the Environmental Protection Agency to clean two post offices contaminated with anthrax spores.</li> <li>• CDC distributes a press release announcing that the Food and Drug Administration has approved doxycycline for postexposure prophylaxis for anthrax, and begins recommending its use instead of ciprofloxacin.</li> <li>• In Washington, D.C., a Brentwood postal employee seeks medical attention.</li> <li>• U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases personnel continue their analyses of the anthrax in the letter sent to Senator Daschle.</li> </ul>
Friday, 10/19/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In N.J., the Department of Health and Senior Services refers postal employees to their private physicians for medical treatment. The mayor makes alternative arrangements and employees begin seeking treatment at a local hospital. CDC confirms that another N.J. postal employee has cutaneous anthrax.</li> <li>• In Washington, D.C., a hospital notifies CDC that it has admitted a Brentwood employee with a possible case of inhalation anthrax.</li> <li>• U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases personnel brief FBI personnel on, among other things, their observations about the size of the anthrax particles in Senator Daschle's letter. Staff from CDC and the Postal Service were not present.</li> <li>• The FBI recovers the contaminated letter to the <i>New York Post</i>. The letter was recovered unopened from mail that had been set aside as suspicious by the media company.</li> </ul>
Saturday, 10/20/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Washington, D.C., another Brentwood employee is admitted to a hospital with a respiratory condition.</li> <li>• CDC arrives at the Brentwood facility to meet with Postal Service managers and monitor the employee admitted to the hospital on 10/19. According to Postal Service officials, CDC informed them that there was no reason to close Brentwood unless and until an employee is confirmed to have inhalation anthrax.</li> <li>• Analyses by the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases determine that the letter to the <i>New York Post</i>, recovered on 10/19, contains anthrax. According to the FBI, the sample was not suitable for testing the size of the anthrax particles.</li> </ul>
Sunday, 10/21/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Washington, D.C., the Brentwood employee who was admitted to the hospital on 10/19/01 is confirmed to have inhalation anthrax. The mail-processing area on the first floor of Brentwood is closed and evaluation and prophylaxis of Brentwood employees begins.</li> <li>• In Washington, D.C., the Brentwood employee who initially sought medical attention on 10/18/01 is admitted to a hospital with a possible case of inhalation anthrax and becomes the first postal employee (and second person) to die.</li> <li>• In Washington, D.C., another Brentwood employee seeks medical attention at a hospital. His chest X-ray is initially determined to be normal, and he is discharged.</li> </ul>

Date	Events
Monday, 10/22/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Washington, D.C., the Brentwood postal employee who sought medical attention on 10/21/01 and was discharged is readmitted to the hospital. This time, he is diagnosed with inhalation anthrax and subsequently dies, becoming the second postal employee (and third person) to die from anthrax.</li> <li>• In Washington, D.C., distribution of antibacterial drugs is expanded to include all employees and visitors to nonpublic areas at the Brentwood facility.</li> <li>• The Postal Service learns that environmental tests of Brentwood are positive for anthrax.</li> <li>• U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases personnel hand-delivered a report, dated 10/21/01, describing the results of their various analyses of the substance in Senator Daschle's letter to the FBI. The report had been previously faxed to the FBI on 10/21/01.</li> <li>• According to FBI officials, the CDC liaison is briefed on the results of the 10/21/01 report prepared by the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases on its analyses of Senator Daschle's letter, but CDC's liaison said he was not briefed until later.</li> </ul>
Wednesday, 10/23/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In N.Y., environmental test results from the Morgan facility, which processed the anthrax-contaminated letters delivered to media personnel in N.Y., are positive for anthrax.</li> <li>• In Washington, D.C., the Secretary of Health and Human Services is briefed on the results of the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases' analyses.</li> <li>• The Postal Service participates in discussions with U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases about test results from Senator Daschle's letter.</li> <li>• The FBI learns that an envelope similar to the ones used in the anthrax mailings had pores up to 50 microns in size.</li> </ul>
Thursday, 10/24/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• According to the CDC liaison, he was informed about the results of U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases' 10/21/01 analyses of Senator Daschle's letter.</li> </ul>
Sunday, 10/28/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In N.J., CDC confirms that a Trenton postal employee has inhalation anthrax.</li> </ul>
Monday, 10/29/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In N.Y., preliminary tests indicate that a N.Y. resident who was admitted to the hospital on 10/28 has inhalation anthrax.</li> <li>• In N.J., laboratory testing confirms cutaneous anthrax in a woman who received mail from the Trenton facility, but had not visited the facility. The woman originally sought medical attention on 10/18/01 and was admitted to the hospital on 10/22/01 for a skin condition.</li> <li>• In N.J., laboratory testing confirms a second case of inhalation anthrax in a Trenton postal employee who initially sought medical attention on 10/16/01 and was admitted to the hospital on 10/18/01 with a respiratory condition.</li> </ul>
Wednesday, 10/31/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In N.Y., the person hospitalized on 10/29/01 becomes the fourth person to die from inhalation anthrax.</li> </ul>
Friday, 11/2/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In N.Y., public health officials announce another case of cutaneous anthrax, in a <i>New York Post</i> employee.</li> </ul>
Friday, 11/16/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Washington, D.C., a letter addressed to Senator Leahy is recovered in mail that was impounded before delivery to Capitol Hill by the FBI on 10/17/01. The letter, which was also mailed in Trenton, N.J., and processed through both the Trenton and Brentwood postal facilities, was subsequently found to contain anthrax. A total of four letters containing anthrax have now been recovered, all mailed from Trenton, N.J.</li> </ul>
Wednesday, 11/21/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In Connecticut, an elderly woman who was admitted to the hospital for dehydration on 11/16/01 becomes the fifth person to die from inhalation anthrax.</li> <li>• The Connecticut Department of Public Health, in consultation with CDC, begins prophylaxis for postal employees working at the Wallingford postal facility, which processed mail to the fifth victim's home.</li> </ul>
Friday, 12/27/01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CDC offers the anthrax vaccine to postal employees.</li> </ul>

Source: GAO based on information provided by the U.S. Postal Service, the CDC, the Connecticut Department of Public Health, the D.C. Department of Health, the FBI, the Florida Department of Health, the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

## Exhibit 2: Example of Informational Postcard



### Text of Postcard:

#### A MESSAGE FROM THE POSTMASTER GENERAL

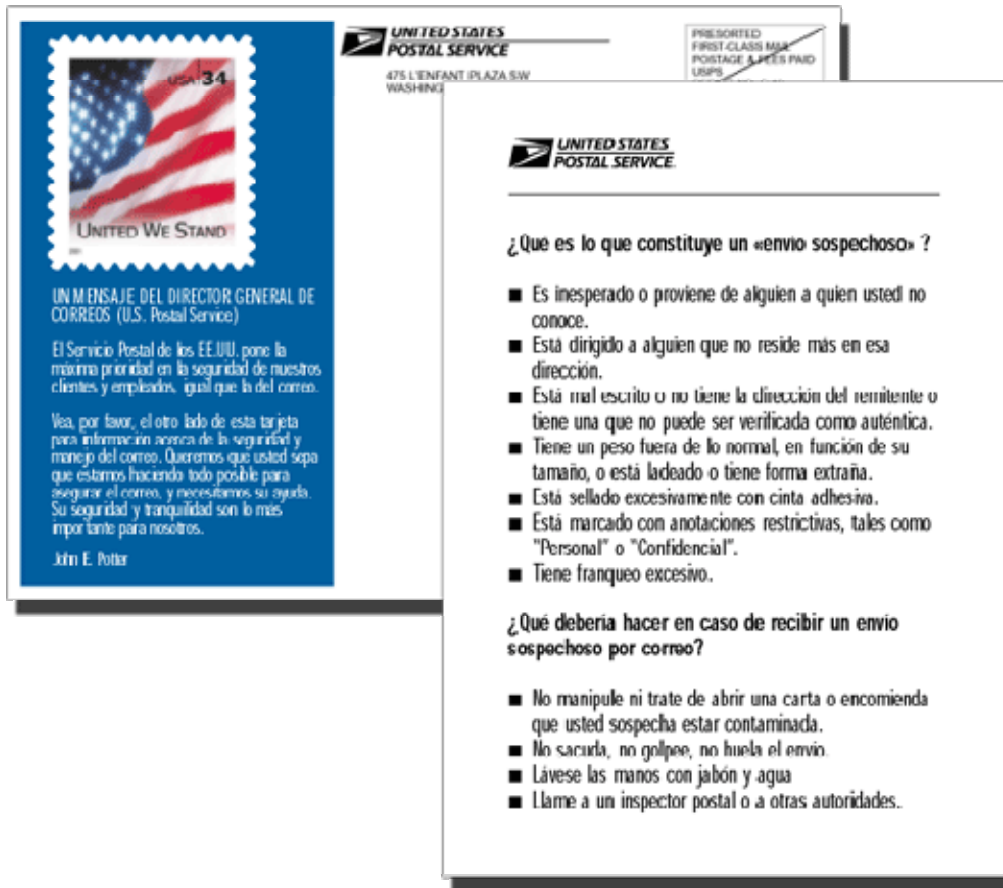
The U. S. Postal Service places the highest priority on the safety of our customers and employees and on the security of the mail.

Please see the other side of this card for information about safety and mail handling. We want you to know we are doing everything possible to make sure the mail is safe, and we need your help. Your security and peace of mind are paramount to us.

John E. Potter

Source:  
<http://www.usps.gov>

**Exhibit 3: Example of Informational Postcard (Spanish)**



Source:  
<http://www.usps.gov>

**Exhibit 4: Press Release October 12, 2001**

## **USPS News**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 12, 2001

Release No. 01-088

### **POSTAL SERVICE REDOUBLES EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN SAFE AND SECURE MAIL SERVICE**

WASHINGTON -- The U. S. Postal Service today issued guidance to customers and employees concerned with the security of the U.S. Mail.

"We are taking every reasonable measure to assure the safety of our employees and customers," said John E. Potter, Postmaster General.

The Postal Service conducts recurrent and routine learning programs for its employees on safe and secure mail handling, transportation and delivery procedures.

"We will continue to work with our employees and the public to re-emphasize safe handling procedures for hazardous materials," continued the Postmaster General.

To allay fear of the unknown, a fact list with questions and answers about hazardous materials and specifically anthrax is attached. Additionally, the public can get further information at [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com). Customers who have concerns about specific suspicious items of mail should contact local law enforcement agencies. The Postal Service is coordinating its efforts with the FBI, Postal Inspection Service and the Department of Health and Human Services.

"We understand the importance of America's mail to its people and the economy and we will continue to deliver our promise of safe and secure mail services," concluded Potter. "As always the security and safety of the mail is of the utmost importance and we will continue to prosecute those who violate these principles to the fullest extent of the law."

Source:  
<http://www.usps.gov>

**Exhibit 5: Press Release October 15, 2001**

**USPS News: Press Releases**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 15, 2001

Release No. 01-089

**Postmaster General Announces Mail Security Task Force**

DENVER, CO - Postmaster General John (Jack) E. Potter today assured the American public that the U.S. Postal Service and the mailing industry are doing everything within their power to ensure the integrity of what's in the mail.

Speaking here to an audience of more than 2,000 mailers attending National Postal Forum, Potter emphasized that the Postal Service has mobilized its resources to meet the challenges and announced the formation of a task force to review every plan and approach it has regarding mail security and the handling of hazardous materials in the mail.

"None of us could have anticipated the events of the last week -- and how someone or some group would target the mail for such evil purposes," said Potter.

But... "make no mistake, we cannot sit back and allow our nation's confidence in the mail to erode," he said, adding that federal law enforcement officers from the Postal Inspection Service to the FBI will bring to justice whoever or whatever group is behind this malicious, evil activity.

The task force announced by Potter will be led by Chief Postal Inspector Kenneth Weaver. Weaver will be joined by representatives from postal unions, management associations, and the Office of the Inspector General, along with safety and medical specialists and members of the mailing industry.

The problem of contaminated mail does not belong solely to the Postal Service, said Potter. It is a concern for mailers and shippers nationwide. And, while the level of risk is relatively small, it is a problem that compels everyone in the nation to be vigilant.

"If we in the mailing industry can spend time now educating and bringing a commonsense perspective to what's happening, we will provide a valuable service to the nation, our customers, our employees, and the U.S. Mail," he said.

What should people do if they receive something in the mail that seems out of the ordinary or raises suspicion?

"Don't open it. Don't shake it. Don't smell it. Instead, keep others away from it, put it in a plastic bag and seal it. Then wash your hands with soap and water and call 911," advised Potter. "Law enforcement authorities will take it from there."

"The U.S. Mail is too important to this nation to allow confidence in the mail to erode," said Potter.

The Postal Service, he added, delivers 680 million pieces a day; 208 billion pieces of mail a year; represents an industry that drives American commerce; and still provides universal service for every family in the nation.

"With additional vigilance -- and with additional work with our customers and the public - we won't let that confidence erode," said Potter. "Americans value what's in the mail."

Source:

<http://www.usps.gov>

Exhibit 6: Press Release October 23, 2001

## USPS News: *Press Releases*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Tuesday, October 23, 2001

# **The United States Postal Service: What We Can Do to Make the Mail Safe**

Tuesday, October 23, 2001

### **To make the mail safe, the Postal Service is taking four important steps: EDUCATE, INVESTIGATE, INTERVENE and PREVENT**

▶ The Postal Service is **EDUCATING EMPLOYEES, BUSINESSES and THE PUBLIC**

#### **EMPLOYEES:**

- 800,000 Postal Service employees are now part of the front line of defense against terrorism
- Like police officers and firefighters, Postal Service employees have given their lives in the war on terrorism
- We will not be defeated. We will not surrender. We will do everything humanly possible to make the mail safe and keep it moving.
- Our employees are a formidable force: 800,000 strong, located on every street and in 38,000 post offices and facilities
- We have directed our employees to exercise extreme vigilance and caution in handling and delivering the mail
- We are providing our employees with up-to-the-minute information about the risks associated with anthrax and the best methods for handling mail
- Information and vigilance are our employees' best weapons in the fight to keep the mail moving and defeat terrorism

#### **BUSINESSES:**

- More than 90 percent of America's mail originates with businesses, which can make the mail safe by employing heightened scrutiny and security measures
- In the past week, we have produced videos explaining safe mail room procedures and provided them to 15,000 businesses
- We are educating people who handle mail at high-profile organizations that could be potential terrorist targets; they can take special precautions to protect themselves and others where they work
- This is not a one-size-fits-all program; we encourage businesses to assess their individual situations and tailor their mail handling accordingly

#### **THE PUBLIC:**

- The best tools the public can use to make the mail safe are CAUTION and COMMON SENSE
- The Postal Service has mailed postcards to every address in the nation explaining how to identify and isolate suspicious mail; FOLLOW THESE COMMON SENSE DIRECTIONS
- The proper steps are simple: Don't open or shake suspicious mail; Isolate it; Call the appropriate authorities

- We are consulting the foremost public health experts to get the best advice for dealing with medical issues
- We are committed to providing the public with the best, most current information we have about the state of the mail
- Stay informed; the news media are providing up-to-the-minute information about the state of the mail
- Send a card or letter to someone you know or love; don't be defeated by terrorism
- Use the new "United We Stand" stamp that the Post Office is issuing Wednesday 10/24/01

▶ **The Postal Service is INVESTIGATING to see that justice is done**

- The Postal Inspection Service has 1,900 inspectors who are working night and day to bring the perpetrators of this attack to justice
- While we don't provide details of our investigation, we have gathered significant information that can help us trace the origins of this attack and the originators
- We are offering a \$1 MILLION REWARD for information leading to the capture of the terrorists who attacked the mail; you can provide tips by calling 800 CRIME-TV
- We will not tolerate any act that spreads fear through the mail
- We are dealing harshly with hoaxes that falsely invoke the threat of anthrax; they divert resources away from fighting real threat and needlessly spread fear

▶ **The Postal Service is INTERVENING if the public or our employees are put at risk by terrorism**

- We have now lost members of the Postal Service family to this attack; nothing could be more painful or more serious to us
- We are doing EVERYTHING HUMANLY POSSIBLE to assure the safety of our workers and the public
- We are consulting the foremost public health authorities and basing our decisions on the up-to-the-minute information they provide
- This is a new day and we are dealing with a new threat; we are moving quickly and decisively when new information becomes available
- We have taken CONCRETE STEPS to react when workers are threatened:
  - When we have evidence that a postal facility has been contaminated, we have closed it immediately
  - When we have evidence that postal employees have been put at risk, we provide the appropriate testing or medication, depending on what health authorities advise us to do
  - We are working closely with union leaders to help communicate safety procedures to our workers and ensure they are followed

▶ **The Postal Service is PREVENTING potential problems by adopting tough new safety measures**

- We are taking CONCRETE STEPS to assure the safety of the public:
  - We are adopting and IMMEDIATELY deploying new technology that will fight anthrax that might move through the mail
  - This new technology is already being used successfully to fight bacteria in the food supply
  - This new technology will not be cheap but we are committed to spending what it takes to make the mail safe

- We are taking CONCRETE STEPS to assure the safety of our workers:
  - We are providing all our employees who process mail with masks and gloves for their protection; though there is no definitive public-health answer about the level of protection these devices provide, we are leaving no stone unturned
  - We are directing all our employees to notify us if they seek admission to a hospital, so we can quickly detect any pattern of medical problems that might develop
  - We are changing the procedures we use to clean mail sorting equipment; we are no longer using air gusts to scatter dust and other particles, and instead are vacuuming equipment in a way that absorbs dust and other particles
  - We are directing postal facilities to use stronger, antibacterial cleaning chemicals as part of their routine maintenance

*Source:*

*<http://www.usps.gov>*