





# Mail Security: Three Best Practices

Every year thousands\* of businesses, governmental organizations, NGOs, and prominent individuals receive threats through the mail. These can take many forms including:

<b>Dangerous Items</b>  <p>Needles, razor blades, guns, knives, and lithium ion batteries are just a few of the items that could hurt recipients or mail handlers.</p>	<b>Explosives</b>  <p>In just one 10-day period in 2018, 16 pipe bombs were mailed to prominent Democratic Party politicians and President Trump.</p>	<b>Contraband</b>  <p>Many companies have found illegal drugs being sent to employees through the USPS and internal mail.</p>	<b>Powders</b>  <p>Five people were killed by letters containing anthrax in 2001; since then white powder has been commonly used as a mail-borne threat.</p>
<b>Liquids</b>  <p>Acids, tear gas, and other liquids can cause havoc and injury if released in a workplace.</p>	<b>Chemical</b>  <p>Many chemicals used in industrial applications are dangerous and readily available for purchase and shipping by bad actors.</p>	<b>Biological</b>  <p>Biological threats include microorganisms, viruses, and toxins that can harm humans.</p>	<b>Nuclear</b>  <p>If radioactive materials were to be released in a workplace, they could seriously harm people and render the facility permanently unusable.</p>

Sometimes these are combined, such as an explosive device with a chemical agent. More often than not these are hoaxes containing powders or liquids. Traditional X-ray scanners can only detect explosives, dangerous items, and contraband. Millimeter wave scanners, like MailSecur, can detect all of these, including hoaxes.”

\*The USPS reported over 3,000 threats in 2018, up 30% from the year before, and over 250,000 items sent to their forensics lab for analysis. The ATF/US Bomb Center studied over 7,000 threats.



While every person, package, and backpack coming in the business front door is inspected, at many companies the mail and packages coming in through the mailroom get little attention.

The consistent use of three best practices are at the heart of mailroom security:

1. Identify the chain of custody
2. Recognize that the size of the package is important
3. Conduct visual inspections outside and in

Let's look at each of these in more detail.



# 1. Identify the Chain of Custody

The chain of custody is one of the easiest, quickest, and most reliable ways to discriminate mail threats from non-threats.

If the sender is reliably identified, the package has been moved the entire time by a known shipper, and the recipient is expecting the package, that makes it much less likely that it contains a threat. It's the mail equivalent of the airport security question: "Did you pack your bags yourself and have them with you at all times?"

Legally mailed items are safe and secure from drop-off to pick up -- if what is declared inside is accurately presented. When the shipper takes the item to the post office or shipper, they declare what is in it, often pay with a credit card (which affirmatively identifies them), the package often is insured, and the recipient is aware it is coming.

Compare that to mailed items in which the sender is unknown and the recipient is not expecting it. Threats are more likely to arrive through means that require no chain of custody.

As carriers such as UPS and FedEx strengthen their security the weak areas are harder and harder to find. The use of those companies for illegal or threatening purposes has fallen off in practice simply due to the low chance of success.

Today most threats are sent through the United States Postal Service (USPS), their pre-paid postage, and anonymous blue collection boxes. The USPS is the one organization that still functions on the general trust of the public and has not implemented chain of custody requirements. Through the USPS it is as simple as using enough postage, and keeping the size below half an inch thick and weighing less than 10 ounces, and the threat will arrive at the intended target.

## 2. Recognize that the Size of the Package is Important

In October, 2019, the USPS reduced the allowable size for packages dropped off (anonymously) in its blue collection boxes.

Any package larger than half an inch thick or 10 ounces in weight must be sent at a post office, which establishes some chain of custody.

The result is that threats are more likely to arrive in small packages.

For people who want to ship large quantities of contraband materials, like drugs, these smaller packages mean that they now need to send more of them.

For people who want to terrorize a workplace, though, a single small package filled with powders, liquids, and other threats is still more than enough.

### 3. Conduct Visual Inspections Outside and In

When a small package with a poor chain of custody arrives in a mailroom, the first line of defense is the eyes of the employees. After all, our sense of sight is by far our strongest sense.

A visual screening of the outside of a package can often quickly spot suspicious markings such as:

- Missing or questionable return address
- Restrictive markings such as “Personal”
- Incorrect addresses or no return address
- Sealed with tape or overly secured
- Misspelled or poorly written information
- Stains, discoloration or strange odors
- Uneven weight, too heavy or bulky



When the chain of custody, size of package, and exterior visual inspection combine to raise a red flag, that is when you want to see what's inside the package before opening it and possibly exposing your employees and workplace to harmful materials.

X-ray machines are useful for inspecting the insides of large boxes. RaySecur's MailSecur can detect far more potential threats -- such as liquids, powders, and chemical and biological threats -- in smaller packages.

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**RAYSECUR™**  
SAFE ACCESSIBLE DETECTION

RaySecur is the maker of MailSecur, the leading scanner for the visual inspection of concealed items within envelopes and packages without opening them. RaySecur also provides mail security support services and training.

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