

Suspicious Packages SOP

Title:

Suspicious Packages Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

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1. Introduction and Purpose

The main purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is to establish a safe and systematic approach for staff to identify, report and respond to suspicious packages left unattended on hospital premises or delivered through the mail.

This procedure sits alongside the NHS Lothian Physical Security Policy and is aimed at providing additional information for all staff.

2. Scope, Objectives, and other aligned processes on how to deal with Suspicious Packages

This Suspicious Packages SOP is relevant to all staff within NHS Lothian. Our objectives are:

- To provide resources, by way of effective support and supervision, positive communication, accurate information, and targeted education to meet these objectives.
- To implement measures which will help all staff on NHS Lothian premises identify and safely deal with any suspicious packages
- To implement measures that will ensure the safety of all staff, patients, and visitors on NHS Lothian sites in the event of a suspicious package discovery.

There are other policies and procedures that are also relevant to the content of this SOP such as (but not limited to):

- [NHS Lothian Physical Security Policy](#)
- [NHS Lothian CCTV Policy](#)
- [NHS Lothian Postal Services Policy](#)

3. Definition of a Suspicious Package

NHS Lothian premises are, for the most part, publicly accessible and are therefore highly vulnerable to terrorist threats. Although the majority of threats are hoaxes, there is always the danger that they are genuine. It is therefore of utmost importance that all staff are aware of the correct action to take should they find or be informed of a suspicious package, in order to minimise danger to life and to prevent the spread of alarm or panic.

A package may be deemed suspicious if it:

- Has visual clues suggesting it may be hazardous – wires, circuit boards, batteries, adhesive tape, liquids, putty-like or unusual substances
- Emits unusual odours or sounds
- Is unexpectedly delivered or left unattended in a high-risk area
- Has been hidden from view deliberately
- Has been found after a suspicious event
- An item has been found and the owner cannot be identified
- Lacks a return address or has a poorly written label

4. Systems of Work

4.1 Dealing with Suspicious Packages

No unattended item should ever be ignored however they should all be assessed proportionately upon discovery. Should staff be unable to identify the owner then an immediate response should be taken. If you suspect any suspicious package may represent a threat to life then you must report it as soon as possible and alert those nearby.

This can be done using the **4 Cs Protocol** (as per the Protect UK government guidance):

1. **Confirm** – Does the item have obvious and suspicious characteristics; this can be achieved using the **“HOT Protocol.”** This will help staff to determine whether an unattended item is typical of lost property or whether it should be classed as a suspicious package.
 - **Hidden**- has the item been deliberately hidden from or has any attempt been made to conceal the item from view or place it where accidental discovery is unlikely? Innocent items would not usually be hidden.
 - **Obviously suspicious** - Does it look like it may be an explosive device. Wiring/electrical circuitry, a power supply, or something that appears to be an explosive attached to it. Has it been found after a suspicious event, such as a bomb threat.
 - **Typical**: Is the item typical of what you might reasonably expect to find in that location? For example, lost property is often found in locations where people congregate or wait before moving to a new location.

Once you have made an assessment of the item using the above guidance, and you suspect the item to be suspicious:

2. **Clear** - Do not touch or approach the suspicious package any further, take charge and move people away from the hazard. Move at least 100 meters away from a small item, such as a rucksack; at least 200 metres away from a small vehicle or large item, such as a car or a wheelie bin; and at least 400 metres away from a large vehicle, such as a van or lorry keep yourself and other people out of line of sight of the item. It is a broad rule but generally you are better protected from fragmentation if you are behind hard cover and cannot see the suspicious package. Think about what you can shelter behind. Pick something substantial, such as concrete or brick, and keep away from glass such as windows and skylights cordon off the area as best you can in advance of police attendance.
3. **Communicate** - Inform your line manager, police, and the relevant security colleague in your building. Be prepared to explain why you consider the item suspicious. Do not use radios, phones, or other Wi-Fi devices within fifteen metres of the item and place yourself out of line of sight.
4. **Control** – access to the cordoned area. Members of the public should not be able to approach the area until it is deemed safe. Try and keep eyewitnesses on hand so they can tell police what they saw or try and get contact details before witnesses move away.

4.2 Mailroom Guidance

Bombs can be easily disguised and hidden. You should treat any object which is unusual or out of place with suspicion.

Letter and parcel bombs are envelopes and packages designed to kill or injure when they are opened. They could be delivered by post or by hand.

The following signs should warn you that a letter or package may contain a bomb:

- Grease marks on the envelope or wrapping
- The package/envelope might smell like marzipan or machine oil
- You might be able to see wires or foil, most likely if the package is damaged
- The envelope/package may feel heavy for its size
- It may be heavier in some places than others
- The envelope/package may be soft but the contents hard
- The package may be wrapped more than normal
- There may be poor handwriting, spelling, or typing
- The envelope/package may be wrongly addressed
- It may come from somewhere unexpected
- There may be too many stamps for the weight of the package/envelope
- An excessive number of FRAGILE or URGENT stickers may be used
- Jiffy bags, due to the padded makeup of the envelope, are probably the most common type used today to deliver devices.

If any received mail or package is deemed to be suspicious the following steps should be taken:

- Do not open or pass it round
- If unopened immediately place the suspicious package in a clear, sealable plastic bag and for larger objects use a clear sealable plastic container
- If opened leave it in situ, close the windows/doors, shut off any air conditioning units and evacuate the room
- Contact your line manager immediately. If he/she is not available contact one of your supervisors
- Do not use a mobile phone as this may trigger the device
- Evacuate the building by pressing the nearest red call point to raise the alarm

Further information and guidance on all the above can be obtained from Police Scotland on 101

5. Associated Materials

[NHS Lothian Physical Security Policy](#), approved by the Policy Approval Group, September 2023

[NHS Lothian CCTV Policy](#), approved by the Policy Approval Group, March 2025

[Unattended and suspicious items | ProtectUK](#)