



**STATE OF WISCONSIN  
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**

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ATTORNEY GENERAL

**Issues of Concern for Schools Related to Biological/Chemical Agents**

Just as it is important for schools to prepare for emergencies such as tornadoes and fires, it is also important for schools to update their procedures to address manmade disasters such as school violence, bomb scares and anthrax threats. Schools are strongly urged to work closely with their local law enforcement, fire service and emergency response agencies in developing these plans. In addition to planning for emergencies, schools should implement procedures to prevent incidents from occurring

- ✓ Keep ventilation systems secure, with access only by authorized personnel.
- ✓ Keep chemicals and other hazardous items (such as pool cleaner) in a secure location.
- ✓ Work with local police and fire service agencies to preplan responses to different scenarios, including locally present and unique hazards such as nearby industrial site or rail yards.
- ✓ Preplanning should include locating a safe site for evacuation of personnel away from the building and a method of transportation to this site should it not be in walking distance.
- ✓ Review your school's mail handling procedures, including isolating mail handling functions within office areas away from the general student and personnel population. Reduce the number of people opening letters or items and train those people to identify suspicious letters and packages. Some typical characteristics which may trigger suspicion include letters or parcels that:
  - Have any powdery substance on the outside
  - Are unexpected or from someone unfamiliar to you
  - Have excessive postage, handwritten or poorly typed address, incorrect titles or titles with no name, or misspellings of common words
  - Are addressed to someone no longer with your organization or are otherwise outdated
  - Are of unusual weight, given their size, or are lopsided or oddly shaped
  - Have an unusual amount of tape on them
  - Are marked with restrictive endorsements, such as "Personal" or "Confidential"
  - Have strange odors or stains.

The following information is provided to help schools develop policies and procedures for managing events involving biological and suspicious agents.

- ✓ If a letter or item is received which states or implies a biohazard is contained in the item:
  - Call your local police agency
  - The person opening the item should place it in a plastic bag and seal it. This will prevent the spread of any substances that might be present, and preserve trace evidence such as fingerprints for law enforcement use.
  - Anyone who has handled the item should wash with soap and water
  - If the item contains a substance or powder, do not shake or empty the contents out.
  - If the powder or substance spills out, place a wastebasket, box or other item over it to prevent spread. Turn off any fans, which might spread the substance, and have everyone leave the room until law enforcement arrives.
  
- ✓ If you receive a telephone threat involving biological agents:
  - Obtain the same information that would normally be obtained in any other threat such as bomb threats, and write the information down.
  - Notify local law enforcement.
  - Evaluate the credibility of the threat by considering caller's sophistication including perceived age, any specific information provided by the caller, and any special circumstances that would lead your school to be a target of such as act.
  - If the call is not credible, allow first responders to determine if evacuation is necessary.
  - If the call is determined to be a credible threat, and the biological agent is believed to be in a specific area, isolate that area. It may be safest for students to shelter in place rather than risk them walking into potential contamination.
  - Turn off ventilation systems that might spread the contaminant throughout the building.
  - If the biological agent or substance was introduced into the air handling systems, or it otherwise believe to be spread inside the building, evacuate students to a pre-determined area outside the building. Keep all students and personnel at that site until emergency responders can evaluate the situation for potential decontamination needs.
  
- ✓ Chemical Agent Release
  - If a chemical release takes place, or the credible threat of a chemical release occurs inside the building, evacuate personnel to pre chosen safe site. Evacuate personnel UPWIND from the building. Keep personnel at the safe location until emergency personnel determine appropriate action.
  - If the release is outside the building, isolate personnel and students inside, close windows and doors and turn off any ventilation systems that might bring chemical vapors into the building. Remain indoors until emergency personnel give other instructions.