

Shipping and Receiving: Making Your Mail Room Safe

In this day and age, safety is of prime concern in relation to the operation of mail rooms. From three-person operations to corporate mail centers, well-developed mail center security procedures can be easily adopted by any mailroom. From in-house accidents to more menacing outside dangers, businesses rely on a fully functioning mail room, which requires vigilance and organization. To protect your employees and business, consider the following procedures recommended by the United States Postal Service:

General Mail Operation preventative recommendations: Appoint a Mail Security Coordinator (and an alternate for larger mail rooms). Organize a Mail Security Response Team, if practical, depending on the size of the mail room staff. Create, update, and review security procedures, disaster plan, and operating plans. Train personnel in policies and procedures relative to mail security (i.e. biological, chemical, weapons, or natural disasters). Members of the team should be equipped with cell phones/pagers. Publish an After-Action Report or Incident Report after every incident. Have senior management buy-in/sign-off on the company's mail security procedures.

General Safety Procedures for Shipping/Receiving Mail Areas: Notify internal and external customers, as appropriate, of steps taken to ensure safety of mail. Control limit or access of employees, known visitors and escorted visitors to the mail room with sign-in sheets, badges, and/or card readers. Lock all outside doors and/or prohibit doors from being propped open. Require deliveries to be made in a restricted, defined area. Keep the area for processing incoming and outgoing mail separate from all other operations, as feasible. If a separate processing area is used, it should not be part of the central ventilation system. Discarded shipping/receiving envelopes, packages and boxes should be placed in a covered container and transported to the loading dock for removal. According to Pitney Bowes, leader in mail and document management, the mail room is the gateway to your company, employees, and customers. They make the following recommendations:

Basic Mail Handling Steps at work or home: Never accept mail or package deliveries from an unknown person who cannot provide proper identification and proof of employment by the delivery organization. Be alert for and report any mail and packages left unattended. "Red Flag" alerts in identifying suspicious letter or packages: Packages with excessive postage, using postage stamps as opposed to meter indicia. Address is poorly typed or handwritten and has misspellings. Packages contain oily stains, crystallization or on wrapper or strange odors. No return address. Exceptionally large or lopsided packages. Packages that display evidence of electrical wire or tin foil. Excessive wrapping materials, such as masking tape, strapping tape, or string. If your employees encounter suspicious mail: Do not handle a suspected contaminated letter or package. Do not shake, bump, or sniff the package. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water. Notify a company security officer and local law enforcement. Follow Safety Measures in place where you work: If your facility requires a badge, be sure to have it with you at all times. If you forget your badge when entering, be patient with security officers. Be aware of others entering the building with you. If they do not have a badge, notify a security officer or manager. Whether shipping and receiving or mail room employees, safety is also paramount during routine operations as well. The use of correct tools for the job can help eliminate common accidents and injuries. For instance, utility knife box cutters were designed to make the mail room employee's job more efficient. The enhanced safety features of a good box cutter can prevent contact with fingers. Furthermore, a correctly designed knife will pierce cardboard without damaging carton contents.

About the Author

Ann Knapp writes for Safecutters, Inc., which provides an online store of utility knife box cutters for opening shipping boxes and shipping packages, as well as safety knives to open moving boxes and packages. For more information visit <http://www.safecutters.com>.

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