

Triage and Test Prioritization of Suspicious Environmental Specimens

I. Assess the Level of Risk

Individuals who report finding suspicious materials should contact public safety officials (fire, HazMat and/or police) according to local protocols. It is recommended that the responding officials assess the situation and determine the level of risk according to the following categories:

No Apparent Risk

Specimens in this category include powder, particulate matter or liquid found in a likely location with an obvious explanation and no evident threat (i.e. white powder in a coffee shop).

→ **Testing is not recommended.** These samples can be disposed of in the regular trash.

Low Risk

Specimens in this category include unusual powders, particulate matter or liquid found in a location with no obvious explanation, but no known threat.

→ **Routine testing is recommended.**

High Risk

Specimens in this category include any substance or object associated with (a) written or verbal **threat**; (b) a high profile target; (c) an unusual event determined by public safety and/or public health officials to be of high risk; and/or (d) occurrence of human exposure or illness associated with the incident.

→ **Priority testing is required!**

II. Notification of Low and High-Risk Specimens

1. Call the MA SPHL Bioterrorism (BT) / Chemical Terrorism (CT) 24/7 phone at (617) 590-6390 to consult on testing options.
2. Report suspicious material or specimen known or suspected to contain radioactive material to the state Radiation Control Program's Nuclear Incident Advisory Team (NIAT).
3. Call State Police Bomb Squad if incident is suspected to involve explosives, incendiary devices or if the item is suspected to contain batteries, wires, switches, glass, or metal.
4. Local public health officials and Hazardous Materials Teams should be notified according to local protocols.
5. Notify U.S. Postal Inspectors if suspicious material involves the U.S. mail.
6. Notify FBI if suspicious item or material involves a threat.

III. Specimen Collection and Transport of Low and High-Risk Specimens

It is recommended that trained responding public safety officials (fire, police, HazMat, USPS, FBI, CST) collect specimens. Please refer to the State Fire Marshal's "Revised Recommendations for Management of Suspicious or Threat Letters and Substances" document located at:

<http://www.mass.gov/eopss/docs/dfs/dfs-briefs/advisory-suspicious-substance-2012-cg-v3.pdf>

1. Collection should involve properly trained and protected personnel. Refer to the powerpoint "Collecting and Submitting Environmental Threat Specimens" for guidance. This document can be found at: <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/laboratory-sciences/bt-kit-use.pdf>
2. For **Ricin** testing, please collect specimens in a PLASTIC container; avoid glass containers.
3. Complete the *Biological/Chemical Threat Specimen Form*. The form is available at: <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/laboratory-sciences/bt-intake-form.pdf>
4. Call the BT/CT 24/7 phone at (617) 590-6390 before transporting specimens to the MA SPHL.
5. Transport specimens to the MA SPHL specimen receiving area (right side of entrance) at 305 South Street, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130.

IV. Specimen Testing/Results

Low Risk specimens submitted to MA SPHL:

Monday-Friday 8am-5pm: Testing will begin no later than an hour following receipt.

Evening or weekend hours: Testing will begin on the next business day.

☞ Final results will be mailed to the submitter no earlier than 5 days.

High Risk specimens submitted to MA SPHL:

Monday-Friday 8am-5pm: Testing will begin immediately upon receipt.

Evening or weekend hours: Testing will begin immediately upon receipt.

☞ Preliminary test results will be called or emailed to the submitter within 6 hours.

☞ Final test results will be called or emailed and mailed to the submitter no earlier than 5 days.

V. Contact Information

MA SPHL Bioterrorism/Chemical Terrorism Laboratory 24/7 Phone: (617) 590-6390

MA SPHL Epidemiologist On-Call 24/7 Phone: (617) 983-6800

Nuclear Incident Advisory Team: (617) 242-3453

State Police Bomb Squad 24/7 Phone: (508) 820-2121

Comments and questions about this form can be forwarded to:

Cheryl Gauthier, MA, MT (ASCP)
Director, Bioterrorism Response Laboratory
Massachusetts State Public Health Laboratory
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
Phone: 617-983-6266
E-mail: Cheryl.Gauthier@state.ma.us

This document is available at the website: <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/laboratory-sciences/bt-triage.pdf>