

Health, Safety and Wellbeing Guidance

Core | Consider | Complex

Bomb Threats and Suspect Packages Guidance

1. Introduction

The vast majority of bomb threats are hoaxes designed to cause alarm and disruption. As well as the rare instances of valid bomb threats, terrorists may also make hoax bomb threat calls to intimidate the public, businesses and communities, to draw attention to their cause and to mislead police.

An increasing number are sent electronically using email or social media applications.

All such communications are a crime and should be reported to the police by dialing 999.

It is important that schools have plans that include how the information is recorded, acted upon and passed to police.

Note – this guidance is based upon the following UK Government Guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bomb-threats-guidance/procedures-for-handling-bomb-threats>

2. Communication of the threat

A bomb threat can be communicated in a number of different ways.

- in person over the telephone;
- a recorded message;
- communicated in written form;
- delivered face-to-face;
- sent by email or social media (e.g. Twitter or Instagram, etc.).
- communicated via a third-party, i.e. a person or organisation unrelated to the intended victim and identified only to pass the message.

3. Immediate steps if you receive a bomb threat communication

Any member of staff with a direct telephone line, mobile phone, computer or tablet etc., could conceivably receive a bomb threat. Such staff should understand the actions required of them as the potential first response to a threat message.

If you receive a telephone threat you should:

- stay calm and listen carefully.
- have immediate access to a checklist on key information that should be recorded (see Bomb Threat Checklist in Appendix 1).
- if practical, keep the caller talking and alert a colleague to dial 999.
- if displayed on your phone, note the number of the caller, otherwise, dial 1471 to obtain the number once the call has ended.
- if the threat is a recorded message write down as much detail as possible.
- If the threat is received via text message do not reply to, forward or delete the message. (Note the number of the sender and follow police advice).
- know who to contact in your organisation upon receipt of the threat, e.g. Premises Manager / Senior Manager/Headteacher. They will need to make an assessment of the threat and decide actions to take.

If the threat is delivered face-to-face:

- try to remember as many distinguishing characteristics of the threat-maker as possible.

If discovered in a written note, letter or as graffiti:

- treat as police evidence and stop other people touching the item.

If the threat is received via email or social media application:

- do not reply to, forward or delete the message.
- note the sender's email address or username/user ID for social media applications.
- preserve all web log files for your organisation to help the police investigation (as a guide, 7 days prior to the threat message and 48 hours after).

Dial 999 and follow police advice. Seek advice from the venue security/premises manager as soon as possible.

4. Assessing the credibility of bomb threats

Police will assess the threat at the earliest opportunity. When specific intelligence is known to police, advice will be issued accordingly.

5. Actions to consider

Responsibility for the initial decision making remains with the management of the location being threatened.

Do not delay your decision making process waiting for the arrival of police. Police will assess the credibility of the threat at the earliest opportunity.

All bomb threats should be reported to the police and their subsequent advice followed accordingly. It is essential that appropriate plans exist; they should be event and location specific.

6. Evacuation

Should the Premises Manager / Senior Person decide that evacuation is necessary; the most practicable way would be in accordance with the normal fire drill procedure **Do Not Activate the Alarm System**. Consider the options below.

Calmly, ask each area to evacuate to your designated bomb threat evacuation point which should be at least 500 metres from the building. A cursory check of each room by staff before they leave may reveal any unusual or suspicious article.

6.1 External evacuation

Leaving the venue will be appropriate when directed by police and/or it is reasonable to assume the threat is credible, and when evacuation will move people towards a safer location.

At least two assembly points should be identified in opposing directions, and at least 500 metres from the suspicious item, incident or location.

Where possible the assembly point should not be a car park.

It is essential that evacuation plans exist; they should be event and location specific. The police will establish cordons depending upon the size of an identified suspect device. Always follow police directions and avoid assembly close to a police cordon.

6.2 Internal or inwards evacuation ('invacuation')

There are occasions when it is safer to remain inside. Staying in your venue and moving people away from external windows/walls is relevant when it is known that a bomb is not within or immediately adjacent to your building.

If the suspect device is outside your venue, people may be exposed to greater danger if the evacuation route inadvertently takes them past the device. A safer alternative may be the use of internal protected spaces. This type of inwards evacuation needs significant pre-planning and may benefit from expert advice to help identify an internal safe area within your building. These locations should be in your plans. If the location of the device threatened is unknown, evacuation represents a credible and justifiable course of action.

6.3 Decision not to evacuate or inwardly evacuate

This will be reasonable and proportionate if, after an evaluation by the relevant manager(s), the threat is deemed implausible (e.g. a deliberate hoax).

In such circumstances police may provide additional advice and guidance relating to other risk management options. It may be considered desirable to ask staff familiar with the venue to check their immediate surroundings to identify anything out of place, see search considerations below.

7. Suspect Packages

A Suspect/Suspicious package is a package or envelope found or received, normally by mail or courier or delivered in person, which arouses the suspicion of the receiver because of some indicator or indicators. It may or may not be preceded by letter or telephone threats or warnings. It may simply be poorly addressed, or it may be a hoax.

7.1. Premises Search

See also Appendix 2

If you receive a threat and depending upon how credible it is, you may decide to conduct a search for suspicious items.

This should be conducted in the following way:

- ensure plans are in place to carry out an effective search in response to a bomb threat.
- identify who in your venue will coordinate and take responsibility for conducting searches.
- initiate a search by messaging over a public address system (coded messages avoid unnecessary disruption and alarm), by text message, personal radio or by telephone cascade.
- divide your venue into areas of a manageable size for 1 or 2 searchers. Ideally staff should follow a search plan and search in pairs to ensure nothing is missed.
- ensure those conducting searches are familiar with their areas of responsibility. Those who regularly work in an area are best placed to spot unusual or suspicious items.

- focus on areas that are open to the public; enclosed areas (e.g. cloakrooms, stairs, corridors, lifts etc.) evacuation routes and assembly points, car parks, other external areas such as goods or loading bays.
- develop appropriate techniques for staff to be able to routinely search public areas without alarming any visitors or customers present.
- under no circumstances should any suspicious item be touched or moved in any way. Immediately start evacuation and dial 999.
- ensure all visitors know who to report a suspicious item to and have the confidence to report suspicious behaviour.

7.2 Characteristics of a suspect/Suspicious Package or Letter

The likelihood of receiving a package or letter containing suspicious substances is remote. There are a wide range of dangerous items that can be sent by post such as explosive devices, chemicals or biological agents or radioactive substances.

Where staff are handing mail, it is important for staff to be aware of characteristics that are common to suspicious packages. Some indicators include, but are not limited to, the following:

- unexpected item, especially if hand delivered.
- a padded envelope (Jiffy Bag) or other bulky package.
- additional inner envelope or other contents that may be difficult to remove.
- labelling or excessive sealing that encourages opening at a particular end or in a particular way.
- oddly shaped or lopsided.
- envelope flap stuck down completely (normally gummed envelope flaps leave slight gaps at edges).
- marked 'To be opened only by...' 'Personal' or 'Confidential'.
- item addressed to the organisation or a title (rather than a specific individual).
- unexpected or unusual origin (postmark and/or return address).
- no return address or return address that cannot be verified.
- poorly or inaccurately addressed address printed unevenly or unusually.
- unfamiliar writing or unusual style.
- unusual postmark or no postmark.
- more stamps than needed for size or weight of package.
- greasy or oily stains emanating from the package.
- odours emanating from the package.

7.3 Action to take if a suspect package is found

- If in doubt call 999 and ask for the police
- Clear the area immediately
- Do not attempt to open the letter or package
- Avoid unnecessary handling
- Keep it separate so it is easily identifiable

Avoid unnecessary handling and x-raying:

- if you are holding the item, put it down on a cleared flat surface
- keep it separate so it is easily identifiable
- do not move it, even to x-ray it
- if it is in an x-ray facility, leave it there

Move away immediately

- clear immediate area and each adjacent room, including rooms above and below
- if there is any suggestion of chemical, biological or radiological materials, move those directly affected to a safe location close to the incident - keep these individuals separate from those not involved
- prevent others approaching or accessing the cleared areas
- Do not use mobile phones or two-way radios in the cleared area or within fifteen metres of the suspect package.
- Communicate regularly with staff, visitors and the public

Notify police

- if the item has been opened, or partially opened prior to being deemed suspicious, it is vital that this is communicated to the police
- ensure informants and witnesses remain available to brief the police, and that the accuracy of their observations is preserved: encourage witnesses immediately to record their observations in writing, and discourage them from discussing the incident or their observations with others prior to the arrival of the police

7.4 Responsibilities of the Senior Member of Staff on Duty:

- CONFIRM CONTACT with the Police and stand by until relieved by them.
- Inform the Facilities/Premises Manager and Health, Safety and Wellbeing Service (in normal working hours) or the On-Call Director, out of hours.
- Once the Emergency Services are on site, co-operate with them as requested.
- If evacuating building(s) contact the Fire Marshals to co-ordinate evacuation in same manner as for a bomb threat. Do not activate fire alarm system.

8. Media and Communication

Avoid revealing details about specific incidents to the media or through social media without prior consultation with police. Do not provide details of the threat, the decision making process relating to evacuation (internal or external) or why a decision not to evacuate was taken.

Remember: it is vital that regular drills are carried out to ensure all are familiar with bomb threat procedures, routes and rendezvous points. Disabled staff should have personal evacuation plans and be individually briefed on their evacuation procedures. Similarly all visitors should be briefed on evacuation procedures and quickly identified and assisted in the event of a threat.

Familiarising through testing and exercising will increase the likelihood of an effective response to an evacuation and aid the decision making process when not to evacuate/invacuate.

Contact

Health, Safety and Wellbeing Service
Tipping Street
Stafford
ST16 2DH

01785 355777

shss@staffordshire.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Bomb Threat Record Template

Actions to be taken on receipt of a telephone bomb threat

1. Remain calm and talk to the caller.
2. Note the caller's number if displayed on your phone.
3. If the threat has been sent via email or social media see appropriate section below.
4. If you are able to, record the call.
5. Write down the exact wording of the threat.

Questions to ask? (When Where What How Who Why Time?)

1. Where exactly is the bomb right now?

2. When is it going to explode?

3. What does it look like?

4. What does the bomb contain?

5. How will it be detonated?

6. Did you place the bomb? If not you, who did?

7. What is your name?

8. What is your address?

9. What is your telephone number?

Appendix 1

10. Do you represent a group or are you acting alone?	
11. Why have you placed the bomb?	
12. Note time call started/ended:	

Inform premises Manager/Senior Manager/Headteacher
Name and telephone number of person informed:

Dial 999 and inform the Police
Time police informed:

This part should be completed once Police/Premises manager have all been informed
Date and time of call:
Duration of call:
The telephone number that received the call:

About the caller:	Male	Female	Nationality?	Age?	
Threat Language:	Well-spoken	Irrational	Taped message	Foul	Incoherent
Caller's voice:	Calm	Crying	Clearing throat	Angry	Nasal
	Excited	Stutter	Disguised	Slow	Lisp
	Deep	Familiar	Laughter	Hoarse	Slurred
	Rapid	Accent What type of accent?		Other detail <i>(please specify)</i>	

If the voice sounded familiar, who did it sound like?

Background sounds:	Street noises	House noises	Animal noises	Crocery	Vehicles
	Voice	Static	PA system	Booth	Music
	Clear background	Factory machinery	Office machinery	Other <i>(please specify)</i>	

Remarks / Additional Notes

Appendix 1

Signature:	Print Name:	Date:
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Action to be taken on receipt of a bomb threat via e mail or social media

1. DO NOT reply to, forward or delete the message
2. If sent via email note the address
3. If sent via social media what application has been used and what is the username/ID?
4. Dial 999 and follow police guidance
5. Preserve all web log files for your organisations to help the police investigation (as a guide, 7 days prior to the threat message and 48 hours after)

Appendix 1

UNATTENDED ITEMS: LOST... or **SUSPICIOUS?**



H

Hidden?

- Has it been concealed or hidden from view?
- Bombs are unlikely to be left in locations such as this – where any unattended item will be noticed quickly.



O

Obviously suspicious?

- Does it have wires, circuit boards, batteries, tape or putty-like substances?
- Do you think the item poses an immediate threat to life?



T

Typical?

- Is the item typical of what you would expect to find in this location?
- Most lost property is found in locations where people congregate.

If after applying the HOT protocols you still believe the item to be suspicious, call 999.