

April 3, 2003

1. The Honorable John E. Potter  
Postmaster General  
United States Postal Service  
475 L'Enfant Plaza SW  
Washington, DC 20260

Dear Mr. Potter:

On December 2, 2002, I wrote to you regarding the failure to follow established procedures for handling suspicious mail at the Hartford Processing and Distribution facility during an incident on November 19, 2002. In a December 17, 2002 response to my letter, you acknowledged that the appropriate procedures were not followed during the November 19 incident and assured me that postal managers, supervisors and employees have been trained on the procedures as well as on other critical first responder, emergency and crisis management plans. You also stated that the supervisor involved in this incident has been disciplined for his improper actions.

I am deeply troubled by reports from Connecticut postal workers that, despite these communications, improper handling of suspicious mail has continued to occur at the Hartford facility. I have been contacted again by the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) regarding two more incidents involving potentially hazardous substances, on December 17, 2002 and January 18, 2003, during which established protocols may not have been followed. On the first occasion, I am told that the appropriate authorities were not summoned immediately, resulting in a two and a half hour delay until the haz mat team arrived. In the second incident, I am told that a postal clerk who found and spilled powder on herself reportedly was directed to walk through the facility to the safety office 500 feet away, potentially contaminating a large section of the facility. According to the APWU, there still appears to be confusion in Hartford over exactly what the Postal Service's policy is regarding the handling of suspicious mail.

As you know, the presence of hazardous substances at postal facilities is no longer hypothetical following the anthrax attacks through the mail in 2001. Failure to follow protocol has the potential for serious consequences. Please provide by April 17, 2003 the following information:

- an accounting of what occurred on these two additional dates,
- what action the Postal Service took in response to these incidents, and
- what the Postal Service will do to ensure that any problems in complying with established procedure are corrected so that no similar problems will occur again.

Sincerely,

Joseph I. Lieberman  
Ranking Member