



GSA INFO
Sent by: GSA Info

To: &ALL RNCR Users II
cc:
Subject: Information about irradiated mail

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The Postal Service is now irradiating all first-class business and letter-size envelopes being delivered to federal ZIP Codes 20405, 20406, and 20407 (and other federal ZIP codes). This includes the GSA HQ Building, the NCR Regional Office Building, and FSS HQ in Crystal City. Tests on the irradiated mail show that the irradiation will kill any anthrax contained in the mail.

There are, however, some after-effects of the process. You have probably noticed that some of the mail is discolored, brittle, and often has pages stuck together. In addition, irradiated mail that contains plastic, such as a credit card, a plastic window on the envelope, or an item wrapped in plastic, does occasionally give off non-lethal chemical by-products, which may not smell very good. The Postal Service is aware of this problem, and is "airing the mail out" for three days before delivering it.

In most cases, these by-products will have no negative effects on GSA associates. However, a small number of federal associates within the DC metro area have experienced problems. The majority of these problems have shown themselves as a minor skin rash that disappears within a few days. If you have sensitive skin, we recommend that you wear gloves when opening mail, or ask someone else to open your mail. Handling the mail one piece at a time may also help, since the rash appears to be more common when a person is handling larger bundles of mail.

A small number of federal associates have experienced respiratory problems from working with irradiated mail. Allegedly, persons with asthma or other pre-existing respiratory problems are particularly sensitive. In order to minimize this potential problem we recommend that you:

- Do not enclose the mail in a box or drawer, since this may contain any fumes inside the box and make the problem worse.
- Spread out the mail so it can "air out" and minimize the effects of any of by-products that might still exist.
- Handle the mail in areas where there is a good air flow.
- Any associates who feel they are particularly vulnerable should ask someone else to open their mail.

If anyone experiences any problems with irradiated mail, please call the Federal Protective Service at (202) 708-1111. If you have any questions about this message, contact June Huber, Director of Management Services, Office of the Chief People Officer, at (202) 501-0796 or via e-mail.

GSA Advisory on Irradiated Mail

The Postal Service is now irradiating all first-class business and letter size envelopes under a pound that will be delivered to federal zip codes ending in 202 - 207. In an effort to inform their federal customers, the GSA is collaborating with the United States Postal Service (USPS), the Federal Protective Service (FPS) and National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) to inform you about the status of federal mail, sanitization efforts and the impact of irradiated mail.

When the Brentwood Post Office was closed due to anthrax contamination, the USPS arranged to process mail in several local plants. This has impacted federal mail delivery in the 202xx-205xx zip codes. Select mail from the 202xx-205 zip codes is being irradiated as a method of sanitizing from bio-terrorism agents. Tests on irradiated mail show that irradiation kills any biological agent, including anthrax, that may be contained in the mail.

How long is it taking to irradiate the mail?

- Items needing irradiation take about **8 days** from mailing to delivery. This allows:
 - 2+ days for items to arrive in DC,
 - 1 day for USPS to reship items to an irradiation facility,
 - 1 day to irradiate,
 - 1 day to get back to DC,
 - 2-3 days to unpack, air out, and spray the irradiated items to remove/suppress any odor, and deliver.

How does the irradiation process affect the mail?

First, irradiated mail does not contain any residual radiation or radioactivity. Possible effects of the irradiation process include such things as discolored, brittle pages that may be stuck together. In addition, irradiated mail that contains plastic, such as a credit card, a plastic window on the envelope, or an item wrapped in plastic, does occasionally give off non-lethal chemical by-products, which may not smell very good. The Postal Service is aware of this problem, and is "airing the mail out" for three days before delivering it.

What are the effects on employees?

In most cases, these by-products will have no effect on employees. A small number of federal employees within the DC metro area have experienced problems. The majority of these problems have shown themselves as a minor skin rash that disappears within a few days. A small number of federal employees have also experienced respiratory problems from working with irradiated mail. Allegedly, persons with asthma or other pre-existing respiratory problems are particularly sensitive.

What are some things I can do to minimize the side effects?

In order to minimize these potential problems the following steps may help:

- If you have sensitive skin you can wear gloves when opening mail, or ask someone else to open your mail.
- When using gloves it is recommended that non-latex powder free gloves be used

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- to reduce the potential for hand irritation.
- Using a moisturizer after washing your hands each time will help reduce dryness and irritation during the winter months.
 - Do not enclose the mail in a box or drawer, since this may contain vapors given off by the mail within the box and make the problem worse.
 - Spread out the mail so it can "air out" and minimize the effects of any of by-products that might still exist.
 - Handle the mail in areas where there is a good airflow.
 - Ask someone else to open your mail if you feel you are particularly vulnerable.
 - Wash your hands frequently and use a moisturizer to protect your skin.

If anyone experiences any problems, you may call the Federal Protective Service Police at 202-708-1111.