

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20502

July 19, 2002

MEMORANDUM FOR FEDERAL MAIL MANAGERS AND FIRST
RESPONDERS TO FEDERAL MAIL CENTERS

FROM: John H. Marburger, III, Director



SUBJECT: Purchase of Anthrax Detection Technologies

Since October 11, 2001 when the U.S. mail was contaminated with *Bacillus anthracis*, federal, state and local agencies and first responders have used commercially available *Bacillus anthracis* detection equipment to identify unknown substances resembling anthrax powder. However, recent scientific evaluation of these commercially available detection systems concludes that this equipment does not pass acceptable standards for effectiveness. Specifically, *Bacillus anthracis* detection thresholds for these devices are well above the minimum level that can infect personnel, and are not suitable for determining biological contamination of personnel, rooms, or pieces of equipment. Many devices also have been shown to give a significant number of false positives, which could cause unnecessary medical intervention with its own risk.

The Office of Science and Technology Policy, in collaboration with the Office of Homeland Security and 14 federal agencies, has coordinated the preparation of *Guidelines for Federal Mail Centers in Washington, DC Metropolitan Area for Managing Possible Anthrax Contamination*. This guidance provides the standard operating procedures for federal mail centers to use in handling, identifying, and delivering a suspect article to the appropriate authorities for analysis. The *Guidelines* are available on the GSA website, at www.gsa.gov/mailpolicy.

The response of a facility to a threat or suspect article should be an integrated effort involving threat assessment protocols with law enforcement, testing by a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) validated facility, and medical evaluation and response with the public health department. Microbiological culture in a CDC-validated laboratory is the "Gold Standard" for determining the presence of anthrax spores. Field-testing solely using commercially available polymerase chain reaction or handheld immunoassays for the detection of *Bacillus anthracis* is not recommended and should not be used for the purposes described in the following paragraph.

Until further notice, the Office of Science and Technology Policy advises that federal agencies cease issuing any new procurement requests, task orders, purchase orders, or contracts for the purchase of new equipment or services that may detect, sample, test or filter air for *Bacillus anthracis* as the method for assaying suspicious mail, or for routine environmental sampling of mail rooms. We also advise that every agency terminate any purchase requests, task orders, purchase orders, or contracts that have been issued for this purpose and where final acceptance has not occurred. The Department of Defense will continue to procure military standard biological detection equipment following the current statutory regulations under which the Department operates.

