



Mail screening matters: 2011 UK hoax campaign

Six 'anthrax' letters addressed to parliamentary figures in 2011 were successfully intercepted at a mail screening centre in east London. They turned out to be a malicious hoax, but the centre's intervention is a great example of why it's important for organisations to implement a robust mail screening and security process.

That's why the Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure (CPNI) has launched a campaign to highlight the importance of mail security. In this case, mail screening measures prevented disruption to the work of the UK government – and it also led to a conviction which could deter future postal attacks.

In June 2011, three envelopes were intercepted at a mail screening centre in east London, addressed to high profile government officials including the then Deputy Prime Minister.

A worker raised concerns because the envelopes looked suspicious; they contained an unusual gritty substance, initially believed to be *Bacillus anthracis*, the bacteria which produces the disease anthrax. However, it was later found to be non-hazardous.

More letters were found at the same centre in October, one of which was also addressed to the former Deputy PM.

The items were found to be a hoax and the perpetrator was subsequently convicted of six counts of hoaxes involving noxious substances and two counts of harassment.

This incident clearly highlights the value of effective mail screening in dealing with suspicious mail, even hoaxes. The mail worker understood the appropriate response and as a result, likely reduced the risk of hazardous incidents occurring in the future.

CPNI encourage organisations to consider their own mail screening and security practices. CPNI's "Mail Screening Matters" campaign provides tools and resources to increase awareness around postal security and help reduce the risk and impact of suspicious mail. Search for more information on mail screening and security at www.cpni.gov.uk