

Quick Reference Guide for Non-HazMat First Responders: Collection & Submission of Suspicious Substances to the Massachusetts State Public Health Laboratory (MA SPHL) for Biological and Chemical Testing

1. Call the BT/CT on-call phone upon arrival at the incident (617-590-6390).
2. Notify the FBI WMD Coordinator if the specimen is associated with a threat (617-742-5533).
3. Notify the Postal Inspector if the specimen is associated with mail that has gone through the postal system (877-696-5322).
4. Perform a Risk Assessment (no apparent risk, low risk, high risk).
5. Don appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
6. Perform field screening (radiation screening on all specimens, x-ray for explosive device on sealed items (refer to below).
 - Request additional resources if necessary (i.e., HazMat, bomb squad).
7. Collect Specimen.

Mail/Threat Letter		Visible/Bulk Powder	Trace Amounts of Powder	Liquids
<p><u>Opened Envelope/Package</u></p>  <p>Collect loose powder in a sterile plastic container. Lab needs at least 1-mL if possible. If sterile container is unavailable, try to contain the powder within the envelope.</p> <p>Carefully place the letter and envelope in a resealable bag.</p> <p>Limit handling of the letter and envelope to minimize the destruction of DNA and latent prints.</p> <p>Seal the bag.</p>	<p><u>Sealed Envelope/Package</u></p>  <p>Do not open a sealed item without prior consultation with the lab (617-590-6390).</p> <p>X-ray for explosive device is <u>mandatory</u> for items thicker than one sheet of paper!</p> <p>Carefully place item in a resealable bag or container.</p> <p>Limit handling of item to minimize the destruction of DNA and latent prints.</p> <p>Seal bag or container.</p>	<p></p> <p>Sterile tools such as scoops, spatulas, laminated cards and gauze sponges can be used to gather powder.</p> <p>Gathered powder should be placed in a sterile plastic container.</p> <p>Plastic container should be placed in a resealable bag and seal.</p> <p>Refer to the ASTM-E2458 “Standard Practices for Bulk Sample Collection of Visible Powders Suspected of Being Biothreat Agents from Nonporous Surfaces” for further guidance.</p>	<p></p> <p>Sterile tools such as swabs and gauze sponges can be used to gather powder.</p> <p>Do not use wooden shafted or cotton tipped swabs.</p> <p>Swab or gauze sponge should be placed in a sterile plastic container.</p> <p>The plastic container should be placed in a resealable bag and sealed.</p>	<p></p> <p>Perform pH to rule-out strong acid/base.</p> <p>Use a sterile pipette to collect the liquid.</p> <p>Transfer liquid to a sterile plastic container.</p> <p>Container should be sealed with parafilm to prevent leakage.</p> <p>Container should be placed in a resealable bag and sealed.</p>

8. Place the sealed plastic bag into another sealed bag and transport bags in a hard-shelled container such as a paint can or bucket.

9. Complete the BT/CT Specimen Submission Form. **Paperwork must be placed on the outside of the hard-shelled container.**

10. Determine who will be transporting the specimen to the laboratory (i.e., local police, fire, FBI, Postal Inspector).

11. Call the BT/CT on-call phone at 617-590-6390 to notify the laboratory that the specimen is being transported.

12. Transport Specimen to the MA State Public Health Laboratory at 305 South Street, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130.

Triage and Test Prioritization of Suspicious Environmental Specimens

Assess Level of Risk: First Responders should assess the incident to determine the level of risk based on the following categories:

No Apparent Risk

Specimens in this category include powder, particulate matter or liquid found in a likely location with an obvious explanation and no evident threat (i.e., white powder in a coffee shop).

→ **Testing is Not Recommended.** These samples can be disposed of in the regular trash.

Low Risk

Specimens in this category include unusual powders, particulate matter or liquid found in a location with no obvious explanation, but no known threat.

→ **Routine Testing is Recommended.**

High Risk

Specimens in this category include any substance or object associated with (a) written or verbal **threat**; (b) a high profile target; (c) an unusual event determined by public safety and/or public health officials to be of high risk; and/or (d) occurrence of human exposure or illness associated with the incident.

→ **Priority Testing is Required!**

Field Screening Suspicious Environmental Specimens

Field Screening for Acute Hazards is Required Prior to Laboratory Submission

Minimum Requirement: Radiation (preferably before the item is packaged) and screen for an explosive device (x-ray, canine) if the item is sealed and has a thickness greater than a folded sheet of paper.

Specimen Testing/Results Reporting

Low Risk Specimens Submitted to MA SPHL:

Monday-Friday 8am-5pm: Testing will begin no later than an hour following receipt.

Evening or weekend hours: Testing will begin on the next business day.

☞ Final results will be mailed to the submitter no earlier than 5 days.

High Risk Specimens Submitted to MA SPHL:

Monday-Friday 8am-5pm: Testing will begin immediately upon receipt.

Evening or weekend hours: Testing will begin immediately upon receipt.

☞ Preliminary test results will be called or emailed to the submitter within 6 hours.

☞ Final test results will be called or emailed and mailed to the submitter no earlier than 5 days.



**Massachusetts State Public Health
Laboratory (MA SPHL)
305 South Street
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
617-590-6390**