

**NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS  
DIVISION OF FIRE SAFETY  
OFFICE OF THE STATE FIRE MARSHAL**



# SAFETY ALERT

PO Box 809, Trenton, NJ 08625-0809 (609) 633-6070

SAFETY ALERT 13-2

**Initial Response to a Letter/ Container Containing a  
Suspicious Substance and/or Threat Statement  
Issued April, 2013**

The recent letters that were sent to President Obama and U.S. Senator Roger Wicker of Mississippi that have preliminarily tested positive for the toxin Ricin are a reminder that emergency responders may need to deal with incidents like this. Incidents may fall into different categories, but all must be handled with responder safety in mind.

<b>Incidents may include but not be limited to:</b>		
Letter/container with unknown substance and threat (with or without illness)	Letter/container with unknown substance, no articulated threat, and no illness	Letter/container with no visible substance, no threat, but recipients are ill
Letter/container with a threat, but no visible substances present	Letter/container with no substance, no threat, no illness, but recipient is concerned	

The Division of Fire Safety recommends that if a fire department responds to an incident, the following steps be taken:

- Secure the area to prevent access by civilians and responders that are not part of the assessment team utilizing the Hot/Warm/Cold Zone concept.
- Utilize full PPE including SCBA but understand that structural firefighting PPE is not designed to provide protection from biological or chemical agents.
- Treat the scene as a crime scene. Preserve evidence in coordination with law enforcement.
- Do not touch, move, or open a suspicious package until an initial hazard risk assessment of the package can be performed by a certified bomb technician (if appropriate) in coordination with HAZMAT personnel and law enforcement.
- Request the assistance of the nearest hazardous materials response team or properly trained and equipped law enforcement WMD team to conduct risk assessments, field safety screening, sample (evidence) collection, decontamination, and other mitigation activities. Any sample (evidence) collection must be coordinated with law enforcement (FBI).
- Ensure that civilians are evacuated from the area and institute local decontamination protocols for those who may have been exposed; especially prior to transport to medical facilities if warranted.
- Contact your local public health department if there is a threat of public health exposure or environmental contamination exists.
- Ensure notification of the appropriate local law enforcement agency who must in turn notify the State Regional Operational Intelligence Center (ROIC).
- Notify the Division of Fire Safety of any incident that may occur at 1-877-653-4737.

**PLEASE POST IMMEDIATELY**