

Aide-Mémoire
Suspicious Objects and Bombs

1. Terrorists, criminals and dissatisfied individuals continue to make use of improvised explosive device (homemade bombs). These incidents involving shocking acts of violence are used by the perpetrator to further their particular aims. They often choose specific targets, but increasingly have shown themselves willing to carry out indiscriminate acts of violence.

2. In Hong Kong, criminals and individuals have and continue to use improvised explosive devices, while the ever-present possibility of their use by terrorist organizations cannot be ignored. Explosives are readily available within the region, as are cheap sophisticated electronic components and other bomb making materials. Information on bomb making is readily available on the internet.

3. It is therefore important to regularly remind ourselves of the ever-present threat of bombs and suspicious objects. Person in charge of any office should ensure that all staff are reminded of the possible threat, and that appropriate measures are taken to improve security. (This aide-memoire applies to office environment, however, general public may refer to it as useful guidelines.)

Assessing the Threat

4. As bombs come in a variety of shapes and sizes, it is very difficult to give a precise assessment on the possible threats involved. Vehicle bombs, for instance, may be anything from about 50 kgs of explosives in a small car up to 2 tonnes or more in a lorry. A bomb placed inside a building is likely to cause far greater damage and more injuries than if the same device were placed outside.

5. It is, however, possible to reach a valid assessment by applying common sense principles, in the light of general knowledge obtained from daily reporting of world and home affairs in the media, and from knowledge of departmental affairs.

6. In some cases, a threat warning will be received from government or police sources.

The Effects

7. When a bomb is detonated, the detonation of the explosive will produce three primary effects and several secondary effects which can create great damage in the area surrounding the explosion. The three primary effects produced are blast pressure, fragmentation and incendiary or thermal effects. For a large bomb, the 'ground shock' under the seat of the blast may also seriously affect subterranean services and facilities.

Physical Security

8. Physical Security is the first line of defense in preventing an incident. Intruder alarms, camera surveillance, security patrols and physical security barriers should be fully utilized.

Good Housekeeping Practice

9. Good Housekeeping Practice both inside and outside the premises will reduce the opportunity for an explosive device to be planted undetected.

10. All rooms, stairways, corridors, halls and outside areas should be kept clean and tidy. Unoccupied areas should be kept locked, extra attention should be paid to communal areas.

11. All staff of any office should be encouraged to know their building intimately and to understand the importance of reporting anything suspicious or out of place.

Vigilance

12. Staff can do much to protect themselves by being alert to any suspicious object or behavior, incidents of which should be reported to security staff, or to the police where appropriate.

Planning

13. All offices responsible for physical areas should prepare contingency plans for responding to bomb incidents.

14. Details will depend upon individual circumstances, but some general principles should apply to all.

- Appoint a single person at each physical location to take responsibility for implementing bomb security precautions (Bomb Security Officer).
- Create plans for checking your premises.
- Decide an evacuation strategy and make evacuation plans.
- Make plans for business recovery.

Background to Bomb Incidents

15. Most bomb threats originate as telephone calls from anonymous sources, although they may also be received through the mail or by other means of communication. Statistics show that the vast majority of threats are hoaxes. However, all threats must be treated seriously and carefully until proved otherwise.

Suspicious Objects

16. Suspicious objects may be found by members of the public who report to police, security staff, or by security officers or staff patrolling the facility, or as a result of a search following a bomb threat call.

Action to be taken on receipt of a bomb threat

17. In cases where a threat is received other than by police, you should –
- report to the police immediately;
 - if possible, conduct an initial check of the premises for any suspicious objects before the arrival of police; and
 - give consideration to commencing evacuation before the arrival of police.

18. All members of staff who have access to a telephone could receive a threat, and therefore should know what to do if they receive such a call.

- Keep calm.
- Try to obtain as much information as possible from the call.
- Keep the line open even after the caller has hung up.
- Report the call to the Bomb Security Officer in the office or to the police.

Checking of Premises

19. Following receipt of a threat, it is useful in appropriate circumstances to conduct an initial check of the premises prior to the arrival of police.

20. Upon the arrival of police, your staff should provide assistance to help identify anything which is suspicious and out of place.

- ANY SUSPICIOUS OBJECT FOUND DURING A SEARCH SHOULD NOT BE TOUCHED AND SHOULD BE REPORTED IMMEDIATELY TO THE POLICE.
- THE PERSON FINDING THE OBJECT SHOULD BE IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW BY THE POLICE.

Evacuation

21. The decision to evacuate will normally be made by the police. However in exceptional circumstances the Bomb Security Officer may have to decide.

22. Basically, there are three alternative courses of action when faced with a bomb threat:

- assess and discount the threat;
- assess, search and evacuate; and
- assess and evacuate immediately.

Evacuation Plans

23. Each physical location should have an evacuation plan with up-to-date drawings of evacuation routes. The purpose is to enable evacuation as quickly and efficiently as possible, using all available exits, or where necessary selected exits, so that people can exit the building without passing or going near the suspected object.

Staff Training

24. Good training is essential so that in the event of a search and/or evacuation, all staff are aware of their duties and responsibilities. Regular checking and evacuation drills must be conducted to maintain staff's awareness, vigilance and effective response.

Postal Bombs

GENERAL

25. Postal bombs are principally built to function when opened or when an article is removed from an envelope or package. They target individuals who would normally open mail. Most postal bombs are designed to remain in the postal system for a period of time and are robust enough to survive the rigours of the system.

RECOGNITION OF SUSPICIOUS LETTERS AND PACKAGES

26. Postal bombs are usually about the size of a normal business envelope. However, their sizes are dependent upon the limitations of the size or requirements of the postal items as enforced by postal authorities. In Hong Kong postal bombs have varies in size from small envelope to a package, which contained sufficient explosives to kill a person within two feet. As a result of experience in Hong Kong and overseas, certain visual recognition points (Annex) have been developed to assist in the detection of postal bombs.

27. Obviously, it would not necessary for a postal bomb to have all these recognition points; however, exhibiting a combination would be a good indication of a postal bomb.

28. The most commonly occurring recognition points in Hong Kong have been:

- Excessive weight
- Excessive securing material
- Unknown source
- Protruding wires
- Excessive postage

ACTION ON RECEIPT OF A SUSPICIOUS PACKAGE

29. If the sender's name and address is given, he should be asked to affirm his despatch of the letter or package concerned, and validate its contents. If such information is not available, then –

- Place the package on the nearest horizontal firm surface. Make no attempt to open it.
- Leave the room and close the door behind you (If it is possible to open the windows of the room before you leave, do so). Prevent other persons from going into the room.
- Call the police or the security officer.

N.B. On no account should a suspicious package be taken to the police or the security officer. It should NOT be placed outside in the street or tampered with in whatever way such as putting it in a bucket of water or cover it with sand.

ACTION IF SUSPICIONS ARE AROUSED WHERE A PACKAGE HAS BEEN OPENED OR THE CONTENTS REMOVED

30. If mail becomes suspicious while it is in the course of being opened –

- Order any other staff present to leave the room as quickly as possible.
- Place the package, or the contents of the package if already removed, as gently as possible on the nearest horizontal firm surface (If possible, keep the face and body shielded which can be achieved either by placing the suspect item behind a

substantial object such as a steel cupboard or by leaving the room and using the wall as a barrier placing the item gently on the floor around the corner of the door).

- Leave the room quickly and close the door behind you. Prevent other persons from going into the room.
- Notify the police immediately or the security officer.

Training

31. All staff who are likely to deal with possible postal bombs should be trained in appropriate response techniques, and regularly reminded.

Recovery

32. The final stage of responding to an incident is the recovery phase, i.e. getting back to normal. In the interest of your office business and the general public, you should develop and test appropriate recovery plans.

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(Revised in July 2018)

Postal bomb recognition points

E xcessive securing material	P roper names and title not, or incorrectly used
eX cessive weight	A ddress – handwritten or poorly typed
P rotruding wires or tin foil	R estricted markings (e.g “CONFIDENTIAL)
L opsided or unevenly weight	C ommon words misspelt
O ily stains and discolourations	E ither unusual or foreign origin
S tiff or rigid envelope	L acks address of sender
I s package expected	
V isual distractions	
E xcessive postage	

- **DON'T TOUCH**
- **EVACUATE IMMEDIATE AREA**
- **FOLLOW LOCAL PROCEDURES**