

PAS 97: 2015 Mail screening and security - Specification

In collaboration with the British Standards Institution (BSI), and with the assistance of a range of stakeholders, CPNI has reviewed and refreshed its comprehensive guidance on mail screening and security. This is aimed at assisting organisations in assessing the risks they face from postal threats, and implementing appropriate screening and security measures, either internally or outsourced.

PAS 97:2015 Mail screening and security - Specification was published on 31st October 2015 and supercedes PAS 97:2012, which is withdrawn. PAS 97:2015 is available from the [BSi website](#).

[An Introduction to PAS 97:2015](#) gives a summary of the PAS 97 process and highlights some of the key information provided in the PAS.

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An introduction to screening mail and deliveries

Terrorists and others wishing to cause harm or disruption have long used postal and courier services to deliver hazardous items to target recipients. A properly conducted risk assessment should give you a good idea of the likely threat to your organisation and indicate precautions you need to take.

Delivered items can include letters, packets and parcels and may contain:

- explosive or incendiary devices
- sharps or blades
- offensive materials
- chemical, biological or radiological (CBR) materials or devices.

Anyone receiving a suspicious delivery is unlikely to know exactly which type it is, so procedures should cater for every eventuality.

A delivered item will probably have received fairly rough handling in the post and so any device is unlikely to function through being moved, but any attempt at opening it may set it off. In contrast, even gentle handling or movement of an item containing CBR material can lead to the release of contamination. Unless delivered by courier, an item is unlikely to contain a timing device.

Delivered items come in a variety of shapes and sizes; a well-made one will look innocuous but there are many [possible indicators that a delivered item may be of concern](#).

Bulky deliveries (e.g. office equipment, stationery and catering supplies) are also a potential vulnerability. This risk can be reduced through measures such as: matching deliveries against orders, only accepting those which are expected; using trusted suppliers wherever possible; maintaining vigilance; inspecting deliveries.

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General protective measures

Although any suspect item should be treated seriously, remember that the great majority will be false alarms and a few may be hoaxes. Try to ensure that your procedures, while effective, are not needlessly disruptive. A properly conducted risk assessment should give you a good idea of the likely threat to your organisation and indicate precautions you need to take; seek advice from your local police Counter Terrorism Security Adviser (CTSA) on the threat and appropriate protective measures.

Ensure that all staff who handle and open mail and other deliveries are and remain aware of the [possible indicators that a delivered item may be of concern](#), and the appropriate [action upon discovery of any suspicious delivered item](#). While this advice applies particularly to staff in post rooms, it is also relevant to all staff who may be the recipients of such items, as well as staff at entrances who may receive hand and courier delivered items.

Train staff who open significant volumes of post to do so with letter openers and with minimum movement, to keep hands away from noses and mouths and always to wash their hands after such work. Staff should not blow into envelopes or shake them.

There is much debate about the use of washing and shower facilities in the event of the release of a suspected CBR material. What is best to do in this regard depends on the nature of the material - the emergency services are best placed to make such judgments. Advice on initial action upon discovery of any suspicious delivered item therefore excludes such advice but recommends that those directly affected are moved to a safe location close to the incident, keeping these individuals separate from those not involved. The only instance where thorough washing is advised is if an individual suffers discomfort following contact with what appears to be a corrosive solid or liquid; copious amounts of water should be used.

Encouraging regular correspondents to put their return address on each item, and in particular to provide advance warning of unusual items can help reduce false alarms.

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Post rooms

Rather than merely being used to sort mail and deliveries, post rooms can be used to provide significant protective security benefits. All incoming post (including Royal Mail, and courier and hand delivered items) should be channeled through the post room and its screening systems. It is therefore important to understand all of the routes by which post is received, and ensure that urgent items do not circumvent the system.

A basic but extremely worthwhile level of protection can be achieved by post room staff looking out for suspicious items, or better still inspecting each item briefly. Post room staff should be well aware of the possible indicators that a delivered item may be of concern, and the appropriate action upon discovery of any suspicious delivered item. As already noted, the exact nature of a suspicious delivery may well not be immediately obvious hence this advice is designed to be applicable in a wide range of situations.

New-build and major refurbishment projects offer significant opportunities to design security measures into post rooms, but some beneficial measures can usually be introduced into existing facilities with relatively little cost or disruption. Post rooms should ideally be located off-site or in a separate building, thereby minimising the disruption to business if there is an incident.

If the post room cannot be located in a separate building, it should at least be in an area that can easily be isolated and in which deliveries of mail can be received directly, without taking them through other parts of the building. The air handling system for such a post room should ideally be separate from that of the rest of the building, with pressure gradients such that air flows into the post room from other parts of the building rather than vice-versa.

Post room staff should have ready access to hand-washing facilities and should wash their hands before breaks and after work.

X-ray machines can be used to screen mail for the presence of hazardous items such as blades and explosive, incendiary or CBR devices. They will not, however, reliably detect small amounts of loose CBR materials, especially if multiple items are X-rayed simultaneously (any container should, however, show up). X-ray machines are available in a wide range of models offering different detection capabilities and throughputs. Be clear about the threat your organisation faces and your requirements before purchasing a particular model; seek advice from your local police force Counter Terrorism Security Adviser if necessary.

A UK Mail Screening Test Piece (MSTP) has been designed by the Home Office Centre for Applied Science and Technology (CAST), at the request of and in association with CPNI, for mail screening applications to monitor X-ray system image quality standards. The MSTP is recommended for checking regularly that the system is performing to the expected standard. [UK Mail Screening Test Piece \(MSTP\) - A Guide](#) gives a description of each individual test outlining the purpose of the test, its applicability to conveyerised and /or cabinet X-ray systems, and the particular relevance of the test to mail screening.

Organisations which assess themselves as being at particular risk of CBR postal threats should seek advice as to whether they should consider using specialist air handling systems or protective cabinets in their post room. Opening all items and inspecting the contents in the post room can significantly reduce the risk of CBR materials being spread to other parts of the building or site.

In the long term, consider moving to a system where post is screened, opened and scanned onto computer at a dedicated off-site post facility and then forwarded electronically to the recipient.

- See more at: <http://www.cpni.gov.uk/advice/Physical-security/Screening/Mail-and-deliveries/#sthash.2S7Ae8fQ.dpuf>