Facilitator’s
Suspicious Mail and Unknown Powders or Substances
Tabletop Exercise Guide
—Small Office—
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Guidelines for Tabletop Exercise Administration

Exercise Overview
This is an integrated series of two scenarios that will provide a facility with a standard approach for exercising its response to an employee finding an unknown powder or substance in a mail piece. This exercise is applicable to small offices or plants with > 50 but < 100 work years. If your facility has a Biohazard Detection System (BDS), do not use this guideline. You must use the large office and plant guide.

Overall Objectives
Upon completion of this exercise, the participants will be able to:

• Discuss the response steps in the current Suspicious Mail and Unknown Powders or Substances Memorandum of Policy dated May 2, 2005 that concerns an open mailpiece with suspicious or unknown powder spilling onto a surface at a small office.
• Explain their responsibilities after discovery of a suspicious or unknown powder in a Postal facility.
• Explain their role in notification procedures.
• Explain the procedures they must follow to notify appropriate response personnel such as Postal Inspection Service (IS) personnel and local first responders.
• Explain the support they are required to provide to Inspection Service and local first responders.
• Appreciate the complexity of emergency response and how regular exercise of emergency preparedness safeguards employees and customers.

Upon completion of the exercise the facility manager will be aware of how well the facility is prepared to respond to a suspicious mail piece or unknown powder spill and should be able to address any required improvements.

Suggested Exercise Participants
The maximum number of active participants is dependent on the size of the facility and the ability of the facility to include all categories of personnel typically involved in a suspicious or unknown powder incident. Categories of participants typically included are:

Facility Operations
• Supervisors
• Managers
• Facility Manager
• Inspection Service Liaison

Local Emergency Response Support (Optional, if available)
• Local and/or State First Responders
Program Materials

1) This Facilitator's Suspicious Mail and Unknown Powders or Substances Exercise Guide
2) Handouts made using this guide and the listed references (at the discretion of the facilitator)
3) References available from USPS Suspicious Mail webpage on “blue”.  
   http://blue.usps.gov/emergencypreparedness/ep_suspicious_mail.htm
5) First Friday Standup Talk: Call it the way you see it: Making sense of suspicious packages, 6/6/05
   http://blue.usps.gov/emergencypreparedness/welcome.htm
7) Poster 205, Suspicious Mail and Unknown Powders or Substances, Appendix A
8) Response Checklist Suspicious Mail and Unknown Powders or Substances  
   (Supervisor Checklist) Appendix B
9) EL-810-96-1, Hazardous Materials Response
10) ELM Section 850
11) Attendance roster
12) Evaluation Questions for each exercise scene.

Facility, Equipment, and Supply Needs

- Well lit training room for the participants
- Rip charts (1 for each 5 participants) with markers and masking tape
- Name tents
- Pencils, pens and paper
- Folders for the handouts
- Suggested room layout (see below)
**Location and Duration**

Generally this exercise will be conducted in a Postal facility, there may be instances when the exercise may take place off site, e.g., as an agenda item included in other meetings. This exercise should take no more than 60 minutes.

**Responsibility for Administering the Exercise**

The facility head designates a person at the facility level to be responsible for planning, scheduling, facilitating and recording the results of the exercise. Persons designated to lead the exercise should have attended the Postal Service’s Facilitative Instructor Workshop (FIW) to ensure they have been introduced to group facilitation techniques.

**Delivering the Exercise**

This exercise is best presented by one or two facilitators who are very familiar with the Postal policy on emergency management, emergency response, evacuation and the facility’s emergency action plan. Persons who have attended the Emergency Management Fundamentals Course, FEMA courses, and Postal HAZMAT Specialist courses may be appropriate.

As an exercise, the facilitator should ensure all participants engage in an active discussion of each scene. The facilitator may separate them into groups at several tables; then proceed by asking each ‘table’ to prepare an answer; call on one table to deliver the answer and; guide a general group discussion of the table’s response.

While one facilitator is leading the discussion of each scene, the other can serve as backup, enter discussion items on a rip chart, and record the results of the exercise.

**Evaluating the Exercise**

The facilitator will introduce the material for each scene of the exercise. The facilitator should not, at this point, provide answers to questions that identify the correct answers for the emergency response processes exercised in the scene. If participants ask for answers, just tell them “We will provide a discussion and review of the correct procedures as we go through each scene.”

When the participants present their solutions to the exercise scenes, the participants will critique themselves with assistance from the facilitator.

Evaluation questions will be used at the end of each scene as a way of determining and recording:

- What participants knew before the exercise;
- What they learned during the exercise; and
- As an opportunity to discuss questions they may have.

**Reporting and Tracking the Exercise**

The facilitator will be responsible for completing the questions at the end of each scene. The facilitator will enter a written record of exercise attendance and completion in the National Training Database as course number 19201-56.

**Notes for Facilitator**

Notes to the facilitator are spread throughout the Facilitator’s Guide.

*These are indented, italicized and boldfaced like this sentence.*
Questions and Suggestions

Questions concerning Postal policy regarding response to suspicious powders should be directed to District or Area Managers, Emergency Preparedness.

Questions and suggestions concerning technical content of the scenarios and the associated exercise Q&A’s should be directed to USPS Headquarters, Emergency Preparedness.

Questions concerning National Training Database recordkeeping should be directed to the local PEDC.
Exercise Opening

*Time Allocated for Opening Session*

10 minutes

*Instructional Methods*

Guided discussion

*Summary of the Exercise Opening*

- Welcome by the senior postal manager present
- Getting to know each other
- Statement of exercise objectives

*Participant Material Used*

Flip charts and markers
Pens, pencils and paper

*Facilitator Media Required*

This Small Office— Facilitator’s Suspicious Mail and Unknown Powders or Substances Exercise Guide

Other Emergency Response references - see page 5, Program Materials.

*Introduction*

The facilitator identifies himself/herself to the participants and addresses administrative matters, exercise duration, breaks, rest rooms, coffee, smoking policy, fire exits, etc.

*Opening Remarks*

The senior postal manager present, or designee, welcomes the participants. The opening remarks should include reference to the role the participants play in responding to emergencies and implementing the facility emergency action plan (EAP). It also should stress the importance of the collaborative relationship between labor and management during emergencies.

*Ice Breaker*

The facilitator opens the exercise with an icebreaker exercise. Ask participants to tell, one at a time, their name, where they are from, their job position and their role in the facility EAP. This is especially important if you have local or State first responders at the exercise.
Terminal Objectives of the Exercise

The facilitator explains that upon completion of this exercise, the participants will be able to:

- Discuss the response steps in the current Poster 205, Suspicious Mail and Unknown Powders or Substances, and supervisor checklist that concerns an open mailpiece with suspicious or unknown powder spilling onto a surface at a small office.
- Explain their responsibilities after discovery of a suspicious powder in a Postal facility.
- Explain their role in notification procedures.
- Explain the procedures they must follow to notify appropriate response personnel such as Postal Inspection Service (IS) personnel and local first responders.
- Explain the support they are required to provide to Inspection Service and local first responders.
- Appreciate the complexity of emergency response and how regular exercise of emergency preparedness safeguards employees and customers.

Upon completion of the exercise the facility manager will be aware of how well the facility is prepared to respond to a suspicious or unknown powder spill from a mailpiece and should be able to address any required improvements.

Expectations

Facilitator moves over to the flip chart and asks:

What do we, as a group, need to learn about handling Suspicious Mail and Unknown Powders or Substances?

*As the participants give their expectations, the facilitator notes them on the flip chart. After getting volunteer inputs, he/she puts this sheet on the wall as a “parking lot” to refer to during the exercise to remind us to address the issues.*

Exercise Scenario Overview

This exercise is composed of two scenes portraying phases of a hypothetical suspicious or unknown powder incident. Facility managers can use it to evaluate their capability to respond to an incident following their Integrated Emergency Management Plan (IEMP), if applicable; their EAP and current Postal policy. Answering the questions posed at the end of each scene will provide the participants and facility manager with insight into response areas that require improvement.

Exercise facilitators should:

- Read the existing emergency management guidance available on the Emergency Preparedness page at: http://blue.usps.gov/emergencypreparedness/
- Review the current Poster 205, Suspicious Mail and Unknown Powders or Substances, and supervisor checklist Appendix A and Appendix B.
- Read the entire exercise scenario to prepare to fulfill the facilitator’s role described at the beginning of each scene.
- Answer the questions at the end of each scene to:
  - Capture the ability of facility personnel to act in accordance with Postal guidance,
  - Identify areas where facility response can improve, and
  - Maintain a record of the results of the exercise and any subsequent improvements for possible review by upper level management.
This scenario takes place in the mail processing area of a Postal facility with 50 to 100 work years of employment. Each scene covers the actions described in the current Poster 205, Suspicious Mail and Unknown Powders or Substances, and supervisor checklist see Appendix A and Appendix B.
Scene 1—The Initial Observation

Objectives
Participants should be able to:

• Describe what constitutes an "unknown" powder.
• Describe what constitutes a "suspicious" powder.
• Describe the steps employees should have taken when they discover a suspicious powder.
• Describe a "suspicious" mail piece.

Time Allocated for Scene 1
25 minutes

Instructional Method
Guided Discussion; Exercises

Steps in Exercising the Scene

• Introduction of the scene
• Q&A and group discussion
• Evaluation

Notes for Facilitator
This scene is targeted at facility supervisors who are likely to be the first to receive a report from an employee of a suspicious or unknown powder spilling from a mailpiece. It tests their knowledge of the definition of suspicious powder and the steps they should take to prevent further spread and to initiate notification procedures.

For Further Information

• Mandatory Stand-up Talk, Emergency Preparedness and Employee Safety
• Suspicious Mail and Unknown Powders or Substances, and supervisor checklist that concerns an open mailpiece with suspicious powder spilling onto a surface.

Scene 1
The facilitator describes the following scene and asks the supervisors and managers participating in the exercise the questions below.

Alternatively, the facilitator can ask each table of participants to prepare answers to the questions and present them to the group.

The facilitator must be prepared to answer follow-on questions about identification of suspicious mail and the initial notification sequence.

During the middle of Tour 3, a clerk finds a mail piece that has torn and observes that a dark tan powder is leaking. She comes to you and reports that the powder is in a non-commercial package and is not readily identifiable as food or drink powder. The package does not have a
return address and the address is handwritten. There are no marked handling or delivery restrictions. It is not an unusual size or shape and does not have any noticeable odor or discoloration.

Q’s and A’s

1 a. Q: Does this situation require a response?

A: Yes, if an employee comes across any powder or granulated substance coming from a mail piece, a response is required unless the contents are readily identified as harmless. For example, a torn package of dried soup or commercial food and commercially packaged powders. If the powder or substance is not readily identifiable, the Inspection Service is to be contacted. A threat assessment will be made to determine if the powder or substance is suspicious or a potential threat.

1 b. Q: Are loose powders and similar materials not directly associated with mail, such as in a swing room, locker room or aisle, for example – likely to be hazardous?

A. No, they are not likely to be hazardous. Everything from donut-powdered sugar to spilled makeup has caused unnecessary alarm, disruption to operations and wasted emergency resources.

2. Q: What characteristics make a mail piece suspicious?

A parcel or letter is considered suspicious when it has more than one of the following characteristics. Start by paying close attention to the Shape, Look, Addressing and Packaging (remember SLAP) of parcels and letters, also:

- no return address (or fictitious or unverifiable return address),
- restrictive markings (such as “Personal”, “Confidential”, or “Do Not X-Ray”),
- addressed to titles or titles with no name,
- excessive postage,
- handwritten or badly typed address,
- misspelled words,
- oily stains, discoloration, or crystallization (including powders),
- strange odors,
- sealed with tape (or with excessive tape),
- unusual weight given size, lopsided or oddly shaped, protruding wires.

3 a. Q: What actions should an employee take upon discovery of a powder or substance spilling from a mailpiece?

A: The employee must immediately notify a supervisor, must not disturb the powder in any way, should prevent others from entering the area and should wash their hands with soap and water as soon as possible.

3 b. Q: Whom should an employee contact?

A: Employees should notify their supervisor immediately. If the supervisor is not available, notify the senior management official on site, or call the Inspection Service.

4 a. Q: What are the initial immediate actions that should be taken?

A: Initial immediate actions to avoid spreading the powder to others by contact or through the air include:

I. Leave the mail piece or substance where it was found. Do not disturb.
II. Clear the immediate area of employees where the mail piece or substance is located and prevent others from entering the area.
III. Immediately notify a supervisor or manager of the situation. If a supervisor is unavailable, contact the Postal Inspection Service.

IV. Wash hands and any other exposed skin with soap and water.

Supervisory Checklist

1. Leave the mail piece or substance where it was found. Do not disturb. Do not try to clean up the substance.

2. Clear the immediate area of all persons and keep others away.

3. Instruct people in the immediate area to wash hands and other exposed skin with soap and water.

4. Direct these persons to a designated area away from the substance to await further instruction.

5. List the names of the persons in the immediate area of the mail piece/substance.

6. Cordon off the immediate area.

7. Shut down all equipment in the immediate area and HVAC systems (heating, ventilation and air conditioning).

8. If possible without disturbing the mail piece or substance, document:
location of mail piece/substance Description of substance, description of mail piece (markings, labels, declarations, postage), addressee’s name and address, mailer’s name and address

9. Contact the Postal Inspection Service with all available information to conduct a threat assessment. Inspection Service 24 hr Division Number:

10. Based on the Inspection Service threat assessment, follow inspector instructions, take actions and make appropriate notifications as required in your local emergency plan. Call your District Manager of Emergency Preparedness to report this incident in the Postal Emergency Management System (PEMS). This is mandatory.

11. Expediently communicate with employees, the local unions and management associations. Limit the information to the known facts and avoid any speculation that may lead to unintended misinformation. To the extent possible, use local first responders to assist in providing information.

If there is any EVIDENCE of an EMERGENCY such as medical symptoms, smoke, fumes, or vapors activate your local emergency action plan and evacuate
Call Emergency Responders or 911
Contact the Inspection Service

4 b. Q:  Follow-up question: Where will you get the Emergency Action Plan (EAP) notification phone numbers?
A: Local answer: __________________________

Conduct a group discussion of the Q&A session to ensure everyone is comfortable with the initial actions taken after a suspicious or unknown powder is discovered; then move on to Scene 2, Required Notifications and Team Response.
Scene 1 Evaluation

The facilitator answers the following questions about the participants’ initial knowledge at the start of the Scenario 1 exercise:

1 a. Were the participants able to define this as a situation requiring a responder?  Y___ N___

1 b. Did they know that loose powders and similar materials not directly associated with mail, such as in a swing room, locker room or aisle, for example – are unlikely to be hazardous?  Y___ N___

2. Were the participants able to define a suspicious mail piece?  Y___ N___

3 a. Did they know what employees should, and should not, do when they observe a suspicious powder spilling from a mailpiece?
   Employees should not disturb the powder in any way?  Y___ N___
   They should also prevent others from entering the area and wash their hands with soap and water?  Y___ N___

3 b. Did they know who an employee should contact?  Y___ N___

4. Could the participants identify the initial immediate actions supervisors or managers should take?  Y___ N___

5. When to initiate the facility EAP, as appropriate?  Y___ N___.

6. When to isolate the area?  Y___ N___

7. Shut down equipment/HVAC:
   a) Any air movement fans in the area and notify facility maintenance to shut down the building ventilation system?  Y___ N___
   b) Shut down any processing equipment or machinery that may have processed or damaged the mail piece?  Y___ N___

8. Remove employees from the immediate area and keep others away?  Y___ N___

9. Notify the Inspection Service?  Y___ N___

10. Did they know where the EAP contact numbers were located?  Y___ N___
Scene 2—Local Emergency Personnel Respond

**Objectives**
Participants should be able to organize facility personnel in a place of temporary refuge and/or assigned assembly areas if evacuation is required and be prepared to provide support to Inspection Service and local emergency personnel who respond to the 911 call.

**Time Allocated for Scene 2**
25 minutes

**Instructional Method**
Guided Discussion; Exercises

**Steps in Exercising the Scene**
- Introduction of the Scene
- Q&A and group discussion
- Evaluation

**Notes for Facilitator**
This scene is targeted at facility managers and supervisors who have continued the defensive actions and who have called the local responders.

**For Further Information**
- Mandatory Stand-up Talk, Emergency Preparedness and Employee Safety
- Poster 205, Suspicious Mail and Unknown Powders or Substances, and supervisor checklist Appendix A and B

**Scene 2**
The facilitator describes the following scene and asks the managers and supervisors participating in the exercise the questions below.

Alternatively, the facilitator can ask each table of participants to prepare answers to the questions and present them to the group.

The facilitator must be prepared to answer follow-on questions about identification of suspicious mail and the initial notification sequence.

After the threat assessment of the spilled powder, the Inspection Service and managers were unable to identify the powder as a harmless substance. Based on calls between the local facility’s management and the supporting Inspection Service office, a decision was made to escalate the situation by implementing the facility Emergency Action Plan (EAP) and calling in local emergency responders. They are pulling into the facility parking lot. The facility manager has maintained the isolation around the site of the spill and has been working with the facility’s Emergency Evacuation Team (EET) to maintain defensive actions.
**Q and A**

1. **Q:** Ask managers to describe the available safe places of temporary refuge or assigned assembly areas that exist at the facility? Ask them what factors would they use to decide on the place of refuge?

   **A:** Discuss the parameters that define a safe place of refuge and/or assigned assembly areas.
   - These areas will be away from the site of the spill. Note: (typically a suspicious powder or substance requiring a response will be found in the mail flow). A place of refuge or assigned assembly area will be away from any mail processing activity areas.
   - These refuge or assembly areas do not share ventilation with the spill location.
   - Depending on the time of year, location and current weather, they locations are sheltered from the elements.
   - Shelter or assembly areas have some access to drinking water and rest rooms.

2. **Q:** The local emergency responders arrive. What should management be prepared to do?

   **A:** All employees and local management must follow directions of local responders.
   Management must be prepared to:
   - Guide the responders to the site of the spill.
   - Identify employees suspected of contact with the suspicious powder.
   - At the direction of emergency responders, assist with:
     - removal of contaminated clothing as soon as possible;
     - collection of contaminated clothing in plastic bags or other sealed containers;
     - arranging for showers as soon as possible; and,
     - creating a list of all personnel in the immediate area of the spill for the 1st responders and the Inspection Service.
     - other assistance required by the first responders.

3. **Q:** What additional things should management prepare for?

   **A:** Management should be prepared to:
   - Provide employees and the appropriate union and management organization representatives with current information regarding the situation without delay and on a regular frequency. Maintain the flow of information to facility personnel in the place of refuge.
   - Provide periodic updates to the District and Area Points-of-Contact (POCs).
   - Provide details of the incident to the District Manager Emergency Preparedness for input into Postal Emergency Management Systems (PEMS)

**Scene 2 Evaluation**

The facilitator answers the following questions about participants’ initial knowledge

1. Were the management participants able to describe how to identify a place of temporary refuge or assigned assembly area? Y___ N___

2. Did they have places already identified? Y___ N___

3. Were they able to describe how they could help to emergency responders?
   - Guide the responders to the site of the spill? Y___ N___
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- Identify employees suspected of contact with the suspicious powder or substance?
  - Y ___ N ___
- If required, assist emergency responders with removal and collection of contaminated clothing? Y ___ N ___
- Assist emergency responders and arrange for showers for contaminated personnel? Y ___ N ___
- Create a list of all personnel in the immediate area of the spill for the first responders and the Inspection Service? Y ___ N ___

4. Could they describe the any additional steps they might prepare for?
- Notify unions and management associations and provide employees with current information regarding the situation on a regular frequency? Y ___ N ___
- Maintain the flow of information to facility personnel in the place of refuge? Y ___ N ___
- Notify and provide periodic updates to the District and Area POCs? Y ___ N ___
- Provide updates to the District Manager Emergency Preparedness? Y ___ N ___
Appendix A - Poster 205, Suspicious Mail and Unknown Powders or Substances

Immediate Response Actions — Suspicious Mail and Unknown Powders or Substances

REMEMBER
PACKAGE  Don’t handle. Isolate it.
PEOPLE  Clear the area of people and notify your supervisor.
PLAN  Contact the Inspection Service and follow your facility emergency plan.

EMPLOYEES — take the following initial protective actions:

1. Leave the mail piece or substance where it was found. Do not disturb.
2. Clear the immediate area of employees where the mail piece or substance is located and prevent others from entering the area.
3. Immediately notify a supervisor or manager of the situation. If a supervisor is unavailable, contact the Postal Inspection Service.
4. Wash hands and any other exposed skin with soap and water.

SUPERVISORS AND MANAGERS — take the following actions:

1. Cordon off the area and keep others away from the mail piece or substance.
2. Refer to and follow the steps outlined in the “Response Checklist for Suspicious Mail and Unknown Powders or Substances”
3. Call the Postal Inspection Service with all available information on the mail piece or substance to conduct a threat assessment.
4. Take appropriate protective actions based on:
   A. The Inspection Service’s threat assessment and instructions.
   B. Your local emergency action plan.
   (Should an emergency situation exist such as smoke, fumes, vapors, or employees exhibiting medical symptoms — evacuate the area and call local emergency responders.) Follow the instructions of local emergency responders and make the appropriate notifications as indicated in your local emergency action plan.
5. Expediently communicate with employees, the local unions and management associations. Limit the information to the known facts and avoid any speculation that may lead to unintended misinformation. To the extent possible, use local first responders to assist in providing information.
Appendix B  Suspicious Mail and Unknown Powders or Substances supervisor checklist:

**Checklist of Actions To Take**

1. Leave the real piece or substance where it was found. Do not disturb. Do not try to clean up the substance.

2. Clear the immediate area of all persons and keep others away.

3. Instruct people in the immediate area to wash hands and other exposed skin with soap and water.

4. Direct these persons to a designated area away from the substance to await further instruction.

5. List the names of the persons in the immediate area of the mail piece/substance.

6. Cordon off the immediate area.

7. Shut down all equipment in the immediate area and HVAC systems (heating, ventilation and air conditioning).

8. If possible without disturbing the mail piece or substance, document:
   - Location of mail piece/substance
   - Description of substance
   - Description of mail piece (markings, labels, declarations, postage)

9. Contact the Postal Inspector Service with all available information to conduct a threat assessment.
   - Inspection Service 24 hr Division Number:

10. Based on the Inspection Service threat assessment, follow inspector instructions, provide escorts and make appropriate notifications as required in your local emergency plan. Get your District Manager of Emergency Preparedness to report this incident in the Postal Emergency Management System (PEMS). This is mandatory.

11. Expediently communicate with employees, the local union and management associations. Limit the information to known facts and avoid any speculation that may lead to untested misinformation. To the extent possible, use local first responders to assist in providing information.

   If there is any EVIDENCE of an EMERGENCY such as medical symptoms, smoke, fumes, or vapors:
   - Activate your local emergency action plan and evacuate.
   - Call Emergency Responders Phone No. 911 or Phone No:
   - Contact the Inspection Service (see panel with 24/7 contact numbers)

**Current Inspection Service Division 24/7 phone numbers**

- Atlanta: 404-988-4600
- Boston: 800-380-3400
- Charlotte: 704-329-9120
- Chicago: 312-838-0268
- Denver: 303-319-3320
- Detroit: 313-226-0184
- Fort Worth: 817-359-2790
- Houston: 713-238-4480
- Los Angeles: 626-499-1290
- Miami: 954-436-7290
- New York: 212-330-3900
- Philadelphia: 215-895-8450
- Pittsburgh: 412-359-7990
- San Francisco: 415-778-5990
- Seattle: 206-447-6141
- Washington DC: 410-715-7790

*Further contact names and numbers follow.*
Appendix C

References

- References available from USPS Suspicious Mail webpage on “blue”.  
  http://blue.usps.gov/emergencypreparedness/ep_suspicious_mail.htm


- Employee and Labor Relations Manual - Issue 17.11
  July 7, 2005 Section 850 Emergency Action Plans and Fire Prevention and Control
  http://www.usps.com/cpim/ftp/manuals(elm/html/elm850_001.html#vnameref_1


- Appendix A - Poster 205, “Immediate Response Actions — Suspicious Mail and Unknown Powders or Substances”

- Appendix B - Supervisor Checklist, “Response Checklist Suspicious Mail and Unknown Powders or Substances”

- EL-810-96-1, Hazardous Materials
Certification

Suspicious Mail and Unknown Powders or Substances

Tabletop Exercise

I certify that I have completed the tabletop exercise (50 employees or above) and reviewed all documentation, posters and checklists and that all necessary improvements have been made.

_______________________________ Date(s) exercise review completed

_______________________________ Location

The Facility Manager must submit this signed completed document to the District Manager and a photocopy to the District Manager, Emergency Preparedness. The District Manager will forward it to the Area Manager, Human Resources.

_______________________________ Facility Manager