



Australian Government
Australian Customs Service

INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDELINES

FILE NO: N08/02023

Title : Air Cargo -Procedures for Managing
Biological Hazards in the Workplace

Date : July 2008

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THIS INSTRUCTION AND GUIDELINE REFERS TO:

PRACTICE STATEMENT NO:

PS2008/08 Inspection and Examination of Air Cargo – Imports

PS2008/30 Inspection and Examination of Air Cargo - Exports

PUBLISHED DATE: 26 SEPTEMBER 2008

AVAILABILITY: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL

SUBJECT: Procedures for Managing Biological Hazards in the Workplace.

PURPOSE: To provide guidance to staff in dealing with biological hazards in the workplace or if they are detected in air cargo consignments.

OWNER: NATIONAL MANAGER CARGO OPERATIONS NORTH

CATEGORY: OPERATIONAL

CONTACT: DIRECTOR CARGO BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT (AIR)

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS

This Instruction and Guideline has been developed to provide guidance to staff in dealing with biological hazards in the workplace or if they are detected in air cargo consignments.

It also details general procedures relating to Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) considerations, COMCARE reporting, Customs Incident Reporting Centre (CIRC) and Employee Assistance Providers (EAP).

It is important to read the complete Instruction and Guideline before proceeding.

INTRODUCTION

The intended policy outcomes of this document are to ensure that Customs meets its legislative obligations and duty of care to successfully manage biological hazard risks in the workplace and ensure a safe and healthy work environment.

Biological agents are bacteria, viruses or biological toxins either released by accident, or deliberately spread to cause injury or death. This document recognises that:

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- While the threat of the deliberate use of biological material is unlikely, this threat is more likely to increase than decrease (given the recent increase in terrorist activities and hoax incidents);
- The consequences of a deliberate biological incident are likely to be very serious, if not life-threatening;
- Technological advances in testing and detection equipment are likely to better identify biological hazards; and
- All staff should be aware of potential hazards and what to do during a biological incident.

INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDELINES

OH&S Considerations

Workplace safety is the responsibility of every Customs Officer.

Customs Officers are to wear OH&S issue personal protection equipment (e.g. steel cap boots, high visibility vests, etc) at all times.

Prior to commencing ***any*** examination, Customs Officers ***must*** assess the working environment and circumstances of each individual tasking to identify factors which may impact on officer's personal safety.

Officers should not rely solely on Customs and associated documentation/declarations when determining the contents of a consignment.

Physical deconstruction should not proceed until a full visual assessment of the whole consignment has been completed and where necessary safety issues have been mitigated.

Officers are to handle cargo according to safe lifting guidelines (*OH&S Hazard Instruction & Guideline – Manual Handling*) and where applicable, use team lifting or mechanical devices to prevent injury.

Customs Supervisors and Managers are to ensure that sufficient First Aid trained officers are available in the workplace.

Comcare

All injuries or incidents are to be reported in Human Resource Information Service (HRIS), to a supervisor and to Comcare via the '*Notification and Report of an Incident*' form. The Regional OH&S Coordinator should also be informed.

Note that there are legal reporting timeframes when reporting to Comcare about instances of death, serious personal injury, incapacity or a dangerous occurrence.

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Notifiable workplace incidents are to be reported to Comcare via facsimile on telephone **1300 305 916**. Timeframes as follows:

Death	-within 2 hours
Serious Personal Injury	-within 24 hours
Incapacity greater than 30 days	-within 24 hours of becoming aware of duration
Dangerous Occurrence	-within 24 hours

All hazards are to be reported according to the OH&S Hazard Reporting Process. Specifically, hazards are reported to an immediate supervisor and to the Regional OH&S Coordinator on the *Hazard Report Form* where the hazard cannot be immediately eliminated, or further action is required.

N.B. Failure to comply with the above timeframes is a breach of section 68 of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 1991* and regulation 37A of the *Occupational Health and Safety (Safety Arrangements) Regulation 1991*.

Customs Incident Reporting Centre (CIRC)

Any incidents that arise during an examination that have the capacity to interrupt or affect Customs business, including security incidents, must be reported to the Customs Incident Reporting Centre (CIRC) on telephone **1800 303 387**.

Employee Assistance Provider (EAP)

If required, the Customs Employee Assistance Provider (EAP), OSA Group, is available to work with staff involved in a critical incident. Trained counsellors can be deployed to a workplace within 2 hours. The OSA Group's contact number is **1300 361 008**, 24 hours - 7 days.

Procedures

Identify the Hazard

Many biological agents are non-volatile and invisible to our senses and therefore very difficult to identify. Biological agents include:

- **Bacteria:** Anthrax, Plague;
- **Virus:** Smallpox, Viral Haemorrhagic Fever;
- **Toxin:** Ricin, Botulin.

There are other hazards that are common in different regions overseas but unknown or little known here in Australia, mainly because of our continued vigilance. These include rabies, foot and mouth disease and temporary pandemics such as the acute respiratory syndrome illness SARS and the Asian bird flu. In these situations, Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) may be able to provide technical advice and should be contacted in the first instance.

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Some biological hazards are infectious and pass from person to person. If biological agents are released without any warning, the first signs of a release may be some time after the event, when affected individuals report symptoms. Most biological warfare agents are typically designed for aerosol (airborne) dispersion.

Situations where Customs staff may encounter potential biological hazards include:

- Testing and examining shipping containers;
- Undertaking ship searches;
- Examining international cargo;
- Examining and processing postal items;
- Searching or handling passenger baggage; and
- Wharf patrol and counter terrorist activities.

Pay particular attention to containers sealed in an unusually thorough way, or those seemingly designed to leak their contents. Again, if suspicions are raised, identify the container owner and do not open it.

Assess the Risk

Potential biological incidents are a serious threat to employees, customers, assets, operations and facilities. They are normally swallowed or inhaled rather than absorbed through skin. The effects vary depending on the agent and they are usually delayed, ranging from hours to days or weeks.

Most biological incidents are likely to have some common characteristics:

- They are usually one-off or isolated events;
- The likelihood of accidents or illness resulting from the incident will vary but the potential consequences are usually fairly serious; and
- They are likely to fall into the high-risk category because of their potential consequences.

It is therefore important that this risk assessment process is conducted speedily and decisively and a move to control the risk/s is made as soon as practicable.

Control the Risk

It will be difficult to eliminate most biological hazards once they have been identified, so staff need to react quickly and implement control measures that minimise or negate the risk to themselves and others. The most common control methods are likely to involve:

- Modifying the hazard – neutralising or reducing the risk associated with the hazard;
- Isolating the hazard – by covering it or evacuating people from around the hazard; and
- Using personal protective equipment (PPE) – to minimise exposure.

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Control measures should only be undertaken where there is no chance of increasing the risks associated with the hazard. **If in doubt, under no circumstances touch, tamper with, or move the biological hazard.**

In this event, immediately evacuate the area and follow local evacuation and/or emergency procedures. This is likely to include contacting the Customs (or building) Chief Warden (or deputy) and/or Police (Ring 000) and following their further instructions.

Given their form and our inability to sense many biological hazards, you may not be aware that you have been exposed. If you are at a site where emergency services advise there has been a deliberate release of a biological agent, comply with their directions. You may need to be decontaminated to remove any agent from your clothing and skin. Emergency services and health authorities will assess and manage the risks for anyone who has potentially been exposed to a biological agent. Health authorities may recommend treatment with antibiotics if you have been exposed. Pay close attention and comply with all official health instructions.

If you do suspect that you have been exposed to a package or device containing a biological agent:

- Do not disturb the package any further. Do not pass it around. Do not try to clean up the powder or liquid, or brush off your clothing;
- If possible, place an object over the package such as a large waste bin without disturbing it;
- Stay in your office or immediate work area. This also applies to co-workers in the same room. Prevent others from entering the area and becoming contaminated. Remember you are not in immediate danger;
- Keep your hands away from your face to avoid contaminating your eyes, nose and mouth;
- If possible (without leaving your workspace) wash your hands;
- If possible have the building ventilation system shut down and turn off any fans; or equipment that is circulating air around your workplace; and
- Follow emergency procedures.

Use the following emergency procedure for every biological incident. The actual order for each step depends on the nature and seriousness of the hazard or incident, and any established emergency procedures in place at the location.

Remain calm; Survey the scene and **ensure your immediate safety** and then consider the safety of others (if it is possible to do so without harm to you);

- Call for help or get someone else to call for help. Depending on the circumstances you should call 000 (Fire Brigade, Police and/or Ambulance) and/or the Customs or building Chief Warden (or deputy) and/or an appropriate First Aid officer. You should advise that:
 - There has been a biological incident; and
 - (if applicable) you and/or others have been exposed and/or injured.

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Also describe:

- The incident or device, including any action taken;
 - The exact location of the incident or device such as the street address and building information;
 - the likely number of victims or people exposed;
 - any symptoms or obvious injuries;
 - wind direction (the direction the wind is coming from, if known) for biological incidents.
- Apply appropriate First Aid if safe to do so.

It is also important that appropriate medical advice is sought following injury and actual or possible exposure to biological materials. Given that in many instances there may be no obvious symptoms or signs of exposure, it is important that appropriate testing and management strategies are put into place. This will help minimise, or negate, any injury or illness.

Monitor and Review

It is important to give results of any testing or incident investigation to those involved as soon as possible after a possible biological exposure. It is also important that staff get continuing information about any investigation processes, so that they are kept fully informed of progress and outcomes affecting them.

RELATED POLICIES AND REFERENCES**PRACTICE STATEMENTS**

Customs OHS Policy – OHS Risk Management – HSMA 2
OHS Policy Guideline – Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
OHS Policy Guideline – First Aid;

OTHER INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDELINES

- *Customs OHS Hazard Instructions and Guidelines*
 - Hazardous substances*
 - Chemical hazards*
 - Manual Handling*

Chief Executive Instruction

- Number 4.12 refers to the use of Mobile Telephones
- Number 5.5 refers to the use of Commonwealth Vehicles

Occupational Health and Safety Act 1991

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- Section 68 states the reporting timeframes for notifiable workplace incidents

Occupational Health and Safety (Safety Standards) Regulations 1994

- Regulation 37A relates to notifiable workplace incidents

Customs Act 1901

- Section 30 refers to Customs control of goods
- Section 33 refers to persons not to move goods subject to the control of Customs
- Section 50, 51 and 51A relate to prohibited imports including certain controlled substances
- Section 112 and 112A relate to prohibited exports including certain controlled substances
- Section 186 relates to the general powers of examination of goods subject to Customs control
- Section 186A relates to the power of officers to take copies of documents examined under s.186
- Section 229 relates to forfeited goods
- Section 233BAA refers to Tier 1 goods
- Section 233BAB refers to Tier 2 goods

Customs Regulations 1926

- Regulation 179AA and Schedule 1AA relate to Tier 1 and Tier 2 goods

Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations 1956

Customs (Prohibited Exports) Regulations 1958

CONSULTATION

INTERNAL

The following internal stakeholders have been consulted in the development of these Instructions and Guidelines.

CARGO BRANCH

PEOPLE AND PLACE BRANCH

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EXTERNAL

AUSTRALIAN QUARANTINE AND INSPECTION SERVICE (AQIS)
STATE FIRE BRIGADE/SERVICES
STATE AMBULANCE SERVICES
STATE EMERGENCY SERVICES
STATE AIRPORT AUTHORITIES

Approval

Approved on 19 September 2008 by:

Approving Officer

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