

# MAIL SECURITY INTELLIGENCE BRIEF

BY DAVID HALE  
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## TAKE AWAYS:



Increased number of fentanyl-laced mail threats targeting the Jewish community.



Election sites across five states received an influx of mail-based threats disrupting voting processes.

## NEW MAIL-SCREENING GUIDELINES FOR ELECTION OFFICES

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) released a new resource, Election Mail Handling Procedures to Protect Against Hazardous Materials.

This overview highlights mail handling considerations unique to the election infrastructure subsector and is intended to help election officials prepare to handle mail safely, identify potentially suspicious mail, and protect against the three potentially lethal powders of greatest concern, fentanyl, anthrax and ricin, in addition to more routine mail hazards.

## Fentanyl Emerges as the New White-Powder Threat in Mail Attacks Against Religious Groups and U.S. Election Sites

*The previous quarter brought a number of threats against all types of organizations and individuals. However, two geopolitical events drove the bulk of the mail-based threats - continued Middleeast conflict and the U.S. election cycle.*

The ongoing war between Israel and Hamas increases the mail security risk profile of religious organizations, necessitating the need for increased mail handling precautions. Historically, prominent voting years, like the U.S. Presidential Election, have seen an increase in mail threats. This year is no different, with election offices and polling sites already forced to halt ballot counting due to suspicious mail, including letters containing fentanyl. The rise in threats has prompted the Department of Homeland Security to issue special mail security guidelines for Election Offices – [Election Mail Handling Procedures to Protect Against Hazardous Materials](#).

### International Conflict with Local Implications

The ongoing war between Israel and Hamas has resulted in mail threats in the U.S. against those associated with both communities:

- Individuals
- Corporations
- Government agencies
- Schools

“ Geopolitical events triggered a significant portion of 2023 mail threat incidents worldwide. Therefore, when assessing mail security risks, organizations should look beyond their local facilities and infrastructures as incidents across the globe could have a significant impact. They also should start taking more aggressive measures to address staff safety, given that Fentanyl and similarly dangerous substances are playing a larger role in recent mail incidents. ”

– David Hale, Senior Security Advisor

These threats reinforce that geopolitical events, no matter how far away they are, can cause local security risks. In 2024, as long as Israel and Hamas keep fighting, we anticipate more mail threats toward the Jewish community and organizations that take an active role [in supporting or protesting the war](#). This is consistent with the incidents observed after the Roe period vs Wade reversal where corporations received threats for their public views on the ruling. Similar incidents may occur, and employers are receiving cautions from [industry experts to be mindful in their responses](#).

### Attempts to Disrupt the Election Process

With the polarized political field and the pending 2024 U.S. Presidential race, we have already seen an increase in mail attacks against polling sites and election offices. These incidents have resulted in injuries from fentanyl and [other substances and halted ballot counts](#).

Suspicious letters sent to election offices and polling sites spotlight the highly charged political field and challenge the sanctity of the U.S. election process. A growing trend in Q4 was the escalation from hoax threats using benign white powders to the usage of fentanyl, a common and extremely dangerous narcotic. This was demonstrated by the November attacks targeting election offices in Georgia, Nevada, California, Oregon, and Washington, [where letters laced with fentanyl were received](#). Exposure to fentanyl can have devastating effects, ranging from headaches and a loss of consciousness to even death. As a result, election sites are now stocking Narcan in an effort to protect workers [in the event of another fentanyl attack](#).

Much like geopolitical events can increase security risks for companies and religious entities, political events, such as elections, can have the same impact on government entities and companies that financially back politicians. It is expected that incidents like these will continue and expand to other sites, such as party offices and corporate offices with public financial ties to candidates. To help prepare election officials, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, part of the Department of Homeland Security, released new guidance on how to protect themselves from mail-based threats – [Election Mail Handling Procedures to Protect Against Hazardous Materials](#).

### Take Extra Precautions to Protect Staff

With the Presidential race officially kicking into high gear, government offices, political figures, and anyone affiliated with the elections should expect more frequent mail threats.

The ongoing war between Israel and Hamas will continue to fuel the risk of mail threats. Religious organizations, or those who actively speak out for or against either side, should take extra precautions when receiving mail or other deliveries.

The use of fentanyl as a threat substance is highly concerning and makes it essential that all mail-handling individuals wear personal protective equipment and adhere to standard operating procedures when screening items. Improving mail screening operations with solutions like T-ray scanners provides organizations with highly effective and safe threat detection capabilities. Without opening the item, operators see a live video of the sealed contents to quickly detect suspicious items. Early detection eliminates the risk of accidental exposure and harm from dangerous substances. If an exposure does occur, timely response is paramount, so high-profile targets may consider having an overdose reversal medication, like Naloxone, on hand.

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**For more insights on any information shared in this intelligence brief, contact the RaySecur Security Advisory Team at [info@raysecur.com](mailto:info@raysecur.com).**

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## Religious

# Omaha police respond to Jewish Community Center to investigate mail containing unknown powder

**November 1, 2023 – Omaha, NE**

Suspicious powder in the mail forced Omaha's Jewish Community Center to lock its doors on Wednesday. Police said a staff member opened the letter, which led to people sheltering in place for about an hour. The FBI and the Omaha Police Department are now working to figure out who's behind it and why. Authorities said somebody called 911 after the Jewish Federation of Omaha's security director opened the letter addressed to the facility inside an office and found powder inside. The center on lockdown Wednesday morning, and about an hour later the hazmat team deemed the substance unhazardous after multiple tests.



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# Suspicious mail delivered to 3 Seattle synagogues prompts hazmat response

**November 3, 2023 – Seattle, WA**

One building was evacuated and services were canceled for the evening as a safety precaution. Seattle police officers and firefighters responded to two reported hazmat situations synagogues Friday evening. According to the Seattle Fire Department, the Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation, an orthodox synagogue located at 6500 52nd Avenue South, was evacuated as a safety precaution. The building security manager, Ben Tilson, said an employee was opening mail when they discovered an envelope with multiple documents. When opening the envelope, a white, powdery substance fell out.



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## 4 Seattle synagogues have received suspicious letters over the past week

**November 7, 2023 – Seattle, WA**

Seattle Fire Department (SFD) officials are investigating after another suspicious letter was sent to a synagogue Monday evening. The letter was sent to Congregation Shaarei Tefilah-Lubavitch, which is located at 43rd Avenue and Northeast 65th Street, near Bryant Playground Park. No injuries or exposure was reported, but SFD hazmat crews were sent to the scene to ensure everyone's safety.



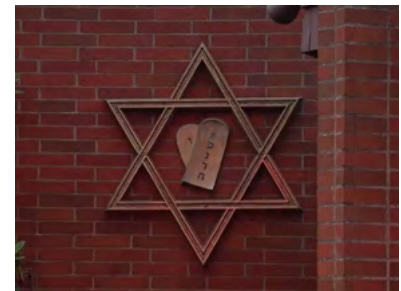
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## FBI investigates after fifth suspicious letter containing white powder found at Seattle synagogue

**November 7, 2023 – Seattle, WA**

Two other synagogues in Seattle received suspicious envelopes with a white powdery substance in them prompting a HAZMAT response.



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## Another suspicious package with powder sent to Seattle synagogue

**November 19, 2023 – Seattle, WA**

A fifth Jewish institution in Seattle has received a suspicious envelope with powder. The package was discovered over the weekend and was seemingly sent to coincide with the Sabbath. The contents of the package sent to Chabad of Capitol Hill & the Central Area on 18th Avenue East are not hazardous, Seattle Fire Department said Saturday on X, formerly known as Twitter. Four other Jewish centers received similar envelopes: Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation, the Congregation Ezra Bessaroth, Congregation Shaarei Tefilah-Lubavitch and Hillel at the University of Washington. The package sent to the Jewish campus organization did not contain any white powder.



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## ‘Suspicious packages’ sent to 2 Mercer Island Jewish organizations

**November 21, 2023 – Mercer Island, WA**

MERCER ISLAND, Wash. — The FBI is investigating two reports in the past three days involving “suspicious” packages being delivered to Jewish organizations in Mercer Island.

The Mercer Island Police Department (MIPD) did not clarify what kind of organizations were targeted in a social media post Monday. A spokesperson for the police department only referred to them as Jewish institutions and said they were not revealing the locations as a way to provide privacy to those organizations while the cases remain under investigation by the FBI. The spokesperson added that the facilities are feeling a sense of heightened awareness and concern.



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## Rabbi says its now ‘all to common’ after yet another suspicious package delivered to synagogue

**November 30, 2023 – Seattle, WA**

For the second time in a week, a suspicious package containing white powder was delivered to Tempe De Hirsch Sinai in Seattle. “That is patently an act of antisemitism and is something that is all too common today,” Rabbi Daniel Weiner said. “Words and language and rhetoric, particularly toxic rhetoric has consequences and has implications.” These incidents are the latest in several examples where letters or packages with white powder have been delivered to election headquarters and Jewish organizations.



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### Election Sites

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## Election offices are sent envelopes with fentanyl or other substances. Authorities are investigating

**November 09, 2023 – Multiple Locations**

Authorities were hunting Thursday for whoever sent suspicious letters — including some containing fentanyl — to elections offices in at least five states this week, delaying the counting of ballots in some local races in the latest instance of threats faced by election workers around the country. The letters were sent to elections offices in the presidential battlegrounds of Georgia and Nevada, as well as California, Oregon and Washington, with some being intercepted before they arrived. Four of the letters contained fentanyl, the FBI and U.S. Postal Inspection Service reported in a statement to elections officials Thursday.



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## Four elections offices in Washington are evacuated due to suspicious envelopes, two containing fentanyl

**November 08, 2023 – Multiple Locations**

On Wednesday, authorities in Washington state said four county election offices had to be evacuated as election workers were processing ballots cast in Tuesday's election, delaying vote-counting. Election offices in King, Skagit, Spokane and Pierce counties received envelopes containing powders. Local law enforcement officials said the substances in King and Spokane counties field-tested positive for fentanyl. In at least one other case, the substance was baking soda. Pierce County Auditor Linda Farmer released images of the envelope and letter her office received. The letter contained a warning about the vulnerability of "ballot drops" and read: "End elections now. Stop giving power to the right that they don't have. We are in charge now and there is no more need for them."



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## Envelopes filled with white powder mailed to multiple county election offices across Washington

**November 08, 2023 – Seattle, WA**

A sixth county election office received a suspicious envelope filled with white powder shortly after Washington's General Election. The Thurston County Auditor's Office received a suspicious piece of mail on Nov. 13 making it the sixth county elections office in Washington to be targeted around the General Election. Authorities say these offices have received envelopes filled with white powder. At least two of the envelopes tested positive for fentanyl, according to police in Renton and Spokane.



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## Suspicious letters laced with fentanyl sent to election offices in California

**November 10, 2023 – Multiple Locations (California)**

The Los Angeles County Registrar said it was targeted by a national fentanyl mail threat where trace amounts of the drug were sent to election offices in five different states. Federal authorities are now searching for the person responsible. FBI and post office officials said some of those letters were intercepted before they could get to election facilities in Los Angeles and Sacramento.



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## Lane County Elections counting ballots again after receiving suspicious mail

**November 9, 2023 – Lane County, WA**

The third round of Lane County election returns, scheduled to be released at 5 p.m. Wednesday, were delayed after the elections office received “suspicious mail” that county officials said was sent to intimidate elections officials. The office received a piece of mail that an employee identified Wednesday afternoon as possibly containing a suspicious chemical, county spokesperson Devon Ashbridge said. Ashbridge said the office would review its mail handling protocol and increase security there before the 2024 elections.



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## FBI now involved in investigation after ‘white, powdery substance’ found in letter sent to Texas AG’s Office

**November 9, 2023 – Austin, TX**

Officials are investigating after a “white, powdery substance” was found in a letter sent to the Texas Attorney General’s Office on Thursday morning. At 9:20 a.m., the Austin Fire Department (AFD) said its special operations crew and Austin-Travis County EMS (ATCEMS) medics were investigating a “potential hazardous materials incident” at the Williams P. Clements State Office Building at 300 West 15th St. Thirty minutes later, ATCEMS said it had three ambulances and two district commanders on the scene of the incident. Officials with AFD, ATCEMS and the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) confirmed that the agencies responded to a report of a letter containing an unknown, “white, powdery substance” that had been mailed to the AG’s Office, but not addressed to anyone specific. DPS said the first and second floors of the building were evacuated.



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## ‘Suspicious letter’ prompts evacuation of Kansas Secretary of State’s Office

**November 17, 2023 – Kansas, USA**

A “suspicious letter” was delivered to the state’s top election official’s office Tuesday, and the building was evacuated as a precaution. Kansas Secretary of State Scott Schwab’s office was shut down for the rest of the day. “With recent events, we take such things as a suspicious substance very serious,” Schwab said. “Our team is trained if they see something, say something.”



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## Miscellaneous

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### White powdery substance at W'Burg radio station prompts special response team

**November 1, 2023 – Williamsburg, KY**

An unmarked envelope filled with an unknown white substance caused a slight panic Tuesday morning at a Williamsburg radio station, though police said there was ultimately no threat of danger.



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### Las Vegas Gunman went on white powder mailing spree before massacre: cops

**December 7, 2023 – Multiple Targets, United States**

Just before Anthony “Tony” Polito opened fire on the campus of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, the disgruntled professor went to a post office and sent at least 22 letters to universities nationwide, authorities said Thursday. Las Vegas Metro PD Sheriff Kevin McMahill said investigators already recovered one letter that was filled with an “unknown” white, powdery substance, which the other letters may also contain. The sheriff said the letters were labeled with no return address, so he urged anyone working in academia to be cautious when opening any mail that fits that description this week.



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## Two women receive powder-laced Christmas cards in the mail

**December 17, 2023 – Georgetown County, SC**

Two women reported receiving Christmas cards in the mail from an unknown person or people that contained white powdery substances, according to Georgetown County Sheriff's Office incident reports. According to the reports, a 75-year-old woman and a 66-year-old woman – both from Murrells Inlet – received the cards on December 14. Both women told a deputy the envelopes did not have a return address. They said when they opened the envelopes, the cards were packed with “an off-white powder substance.” The addresses on the envelopes appeared to have been written by a child or an elderly adult, the report states.



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## International Threats

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## SCSO: Suspicious package leads to hazmat investigation

**December 29, 2023 – Schoharie, NY**

A suspicious package was dropped off at Schoharie County Court on Thursday containing an unknown powdery substance. The Schoharie County Sheriff's Office says the powder was found to be a possibly hazardous substance. Deputies responded around 3:28 p.m. for reports of the suspicious package being dropped off. Deputies say the package was not in its original shipping condition. The Schoharie County Court House was closed to the public as the package was isolated while an investigation was carried out. The Schoharie County Office building was not impacted by the incident, and court employees were evacuated. No employees required medical treatment.



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**David Hale** is a resident expert and trainer in narcotics and illicit drug detection in the Security Advisory Practice. He partners with customers across the country to assist in their mail screening operations to find dangerous substances and contraband in mail. Before joining RaySecur, David was a decorated law enforcement officer, where he worked on narcotics investigations, led special response teams, and was selected to be a member of the Federal Organized Crime and Drug Task Force. During his tenure, he frequently engaged with correction facilities on drug smuggling and trafficking investigations within prisons. In addition, to law enforcement and investigations, he is skilled as a hazardous materials disposal and response operator.

RaySecur® is revolutionizing how organizations protect against hidden threats with real-time 3D, T-ray security imaging. MailSecur, by RaySecur, delivers live 3D video of contents inside sealed objects to quickly detect hidden substances including powders, liquids, explosives, weapons, and electronic devices, among others. RaySecur's team of former military and law enforcement experts offers 24x365 support for threat analysis and response planning. RaySecur is trusted globally by Fortune 500 companies, government agencies, and heads of state to keep their staff and operations safe. MailSecur is the first desktop T-ray scanner to receive a Department of Homeland Security Safety Act Designation.

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