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April 1, 2011

U.S. Army Europe officials remind people to be vigilant for suspicious letters and packages

HEIDELBERG, Germany – U.S. Army Europe Office of the Provost Marshal officials are reminding members of the U.S. forces community in Europe to be vigilant for suspicious packages and letters.

The reminder follows reports that an Italian military officer in Livorno, Italy lost three fingers and suffered severe eye damage from a letter bomb that exploded in an army barracks there March 31.

Force protection and security officials offer the following information to help identify and safely deal with suspicious packages.

The first thing the experts say is that any suspicious-looking package or letter should be treated as a potential bomb. It's equally important to know that if there is a suspicion that a bomb is in the vicinity, the job of finding and disposing of it should be left to the experts: explosive ordnance disposal teams, military police, or security experts. Untrained personnel should never attempt to deal with bombs themselves.

There are several questions that can help determine if a suspicious package might contain a bomb:

- Is the package from a stranger or an unknown place?
- Is the return address missing?
- Is the package addressed to a recipient by title only?
- Does the address include a mismatched or incorrect name and title?
- Is there an excessive amount of postage, tape or string on the package?
- Is the size abnormal, excessive or unusual?
- Are there misspelled or poorly typed words in the package's address?
- Do the locations on the postmark and the return address differ?
- Are there restrictive markings on the package, such as "PERSONAL"?
- Does the handwriting appear to be in a "foreign style"?
- Does the item smell peculiar? (Many explosives used by terrorists smell like shoe polish or almonds.)
- Is the package unusually heavy or light? Is it rigid or bulky?
- Is the package lopsided or uneven in balance?
- Does the package have oily stains, discolorations or crystallization on it?
- Is there a "springiness" to the top, bottom or sides?
- Are there protruding wires or strings?
- Is the package marked "registered" or "personal" in a manner that raises suspicion? (For example, receiving a registered package when none is expected.)

- Never touch or move a suspicious package or letter. Do not cut tape, strings or wrappings or immerse in water.

If any of these questions can be answered, "yes," the package or letter should be turned over to security experts immediately. Isolate the package. Do not shake, bump open or taste it. Call local police or security officials immediately.

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About us: U.S. Army Europe, with NATO and other coalition partners from throughout its 51-country area of responsibility, trains for, conducts, and supports contingency operations. Headquartered in Heidelberg, Germany, USAREUR has forces throughout Germany as well as in Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Kosovo, and Romania, and in Afghanistan and Iraq.

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FACT SHEET

U.S. Army Europe

Office of the Chief of Public Affairs

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THE FACTS: PACKAGE BOMBS AND BOMB THREATS

One particular hazard that is perhaps a larger concern in the military community than most other segments of the population is the possibility of encountering suspicious packages containing explosive devices.

That's why it's a good idea for Soldiers, civilian employees and their family members to be aware of what a package containing a bomb is likely to look like. The delivery of suspicious packages or placement of an explosive device may be accompanied by telephone threats as well, so knowing how to handle a bomb threat call can help to safely resolve a potentially deadly situation.

The first thing members of the military family should know is the most important -- treat any suspicious-looking package or letter as a potential bomb.

Actually, there are two first things to know. The other is that if there is a suspicion that a bomb is in the vicinity, the job of finding and disposing of it should be left to the experts: explosive ordnance disposal teams, military police, or security experts. Untrained personnel should never attempt to deal with bombs themselves.

Questions, questions, questions...

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Danger calling

Department of Defense workplaces should have plans of action for evacuating the area and initiating a search if a threat is perceived. Security officials recommend that Soldiers and civilian employees create similar plans for their homes as well.

If a bomb threat is received by phone, there are some ways to help identify the caller and perhaps get more information about the threat:

- Be calm and courteous to the caller. Listen to what he says, and do not attempt to interrupt him. Use a pre-arranged signal to notify a family member or co-worker that the call is a bomb threat.
- Record the date and time of the call.
- Try to make a note of the exact words spoken by the caller. These can help to identify the exact nature of the threat.
- There are a series of questions you should attempt to ask the caller: When is the bomb going to explode? Where is the bomb right now? What kind of bomb is it? What does the bomb look like? Why did you place the bomb?
- Try to ascertain the caller’s identity by verbal cues. Is it a male or female? An adult or juvenile? About what age does the caller appear to be from the sound of his voice?
- Note the quality of the caller’s voice. Is it notably loud or soft? Is it deep or high? Is it raspy or pleasant-sounding? Does the caller sound as if he may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol? Does the caller speak fast or slow? Is his speech distorted or distinct? Does he have a nasal sound to his voice, a stutter, a slur or a lisp?
- Listen for an accent. Does the caller sound as if he’s local or not local? Is his language good or poor? Does he use foul language or slang? If the caller sounds foreign, try to determine what region he might be from.
- Try to determine the caller’s disposition. Is he angry, calm and deliberate, rational or irrational? Is he incoherent? Is he emotional or self-righteous? Is he laughing?
- Listen for background noises that might give clues to the caller’s location or identity. Is the background quiet? Do you hear other voices? Are there sounds of machinery, street noises, aircraft, trains, office equipment, animals or music?

Does the background sound like a “party atmosphere?” If there is a mixture of sounds, try to determine what they are.

Federal employees should have bomb threat forms in their workplaces that outline the above cues and allow them to record bomb threat calls. Immediately after the call, they should notify a supervisor, security officer or security agency.



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