SoBran INC.

ADDRESSING COMPLACENCY

LESSONS FROM THE 2017 SOBRAN MAIL SECURITY SURVEY

"With over 20% of organizations increasing their mail security this past year, it is clear that business continuity and risk management are essential. Drawing upon our nationwide subject matter expertise with mail security, we are helping organizations make the case for mail screening in the security budget."

Richard Swank, Director SoBran SafeMail

Mail threats can occur at any time, for any type of organization. They may come from terrorist factions, homegrown extremists, or individuals with a grievance against a particular company Mail screening is an essential part of an overall security plan that includes physical security and cyber security strategies to protect an organization's staff, assets and reputation. Yet, many security professionals battle complacency in their organizations and haven't implemented adequate protection from mail threats.

To assess how organizations are protecting themselves from mail terrorism, SoBran, Inc. conducts an annual survey of security and mailroom professionals. Findings reveal how organizations can move from complacency to funding mail screening as a critical component of their overall security plan. Understanding how organizations included in this survey address mail security challenges can help security professionals, facilities managers, mailroom staff, and business leaders shape their own risk management practices.

This year the SoBran SafeMail study surveyed 113 individuals in the United States and Canada who are engaged in the safety and security of their organizations. Approximately ⅓ of respondents work in government or as contractors and consultants to government agencies. The remaining ⅔ come from a variety of industries.

How worried should we be?

Each year, the FBI and US Postal Service receive thousands of reports of hazardous or threatening mail. High profile or controversial organizations are not the only ones targeted by mail terrorism.

Almost one in three respondents in the SafeMail survey report that over the last year they have received at least one mail threat (including hazardous mail and hoaxes). Thirteen percent received 3 or more threats.

Virtually all respondents say they are at least as concerned about mail security as they were a year ago. Twenty-five percent are more concerned than they were this time last year. Even organizations with a mail screening program in place say they are concerned about their ability to adequately protect their organizations and staff from mail threats.

To address their concerns, almost one in four respondents say they have taken action to increase their level of mail security in the past year. Yet, for many organizations a number of challenges stand in the way of improving or simply maintaining their mail security strategies.

Challenges to mail security

When asked to name their biggest challenge, 38% of respondents indicated they must constantly work to gain awareness and/or budget for mail security, combating the complacency that can set in when organizations feel "too safe." Twelve percent said that it was difficult to build a mail screening program with the right capabilities and/or tools. Eleven percent felt they needed to increase training to ensure that staff comply with screening and security procedures consistently.

38%

of respondents indicated they must constantly work to gain awareness and/or budget for mail security.

Choosing where to screen

Screening locations are nearly evenly split between onsite screening and offsite screening, with a slightly higher percentage of screening conducted in a building where most general employees work rather than in a separate facility. Only sixteen percent of the organizations that screen mail have access to a cleanroom environment, which allows technicians to screen each piece of mail separately and isolate hazards so that they do not contaminate other mail or staff.

Threats can enter from any source

Mail which is delivered by the US Post Office is screened by organizations at a higher rate than any other type of external mail received, including FedEx/UPS deliveries and courier deliveries. Among companies that screen mail, internal/interoffice mail is screened less frequently than external mail, though one in three do consider internal mail a potential source of threats and include it in their screening efforts.

Best-in-class techniques

Organizations in the survey that screen mail rely heavily upon visual inspection, with 84% indicating they attempt to identify suspicious letters or packages based on known red flags.

Some mail threats can be identified simply based on the way they look or feel.

For example, explosive devices tend to be heavy and unevenly weighted. Chemical threats containing liquids may slosh or have odors. Powders may leave a residue in the mail tray or on the screening work surface.

However, mail which contains chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear or environmental (CBRNE) threats cannot be identified simply based on visual inspection.

To supplement a visual check, more than half of survey respondents that screen mail (58%) incorporate X-ray scanning into their screening programs in order to get a closer look at the contents of the packages or letters they receive.

X-ray scanning systems are a first line of defense to detect threats that contain high density materials, like the metals found in IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) or PIES (Power Source, Initiator, Explosives & Switches), weapons, sharps and blades. However, X-ray screens are not designed to isolate small amounts of low density powder or liquids and cannot identify chemical or biological threats.

16%

of the organizations that screen mail have access to a cleanroom environment.

More extensive and specialized screening techniques are used only by a smaller group of organizations, and include biological screening (20%), radiological detection (18%) chemical screening (16%) and nuclear detection (9%). Less commonly used techniques are dog sniffing (8%) and swab testing (8%).

Despite the variety of techniques used, only one in four organizations say they are confident their current screening procedures would be able to detect chemical and biological threats. Thirty-nine percent are only somewhat confident and 36% are either not confident or aren't sure about the capabilities of their current screening to identify those types of threats.

Room for improvement

As the results of this survey indicate, even organizations that are aware of the threat of mail terrorism and have taken steps to address it, have gaps in their security strategies which could leave them exposed to an attack.

The primary area for improvement is the screening location. Offsite screening, in which mail is screened in a separate location from where most employees work, is the most effective way to minimize potential harm.

- It reduces exposure to employees, decreasing health concerns as well as psychological issues from real or hoax threats.
- Operations are not disrupted by a hoax or real threat, so organizations can maintain operations and customer expectations.
- Cleanup of any hazardous materials is contained in a purpose-built environment.
- Any detected threats are not closely associated with the organization, reducing negative publicity.

1 in 4

are confident their current screening procedures would be able to detect chemical and biological threats.

A second opportunity for improvement is a deeper emphasis on training. Organizations can increase the knowledge of mailroom staff as well as anyone who handles incoming mail with a variety of training strategies.

- Research indicates "learning by doing" achieves a 75% retention rate. Threat simulations, in which staff practice screening as well as response activities, can help organizations prepare for the real thing.
- Ensuring a documented plan is in place to detect and respond to a threat will help employees know the process. The documents can be required reading for new hires awaiting hand-on training.
- Distributing posters or fliers that describe how to identify suspicious packages increases awareness for all employees.
- Posting emergency numbers such as the fire department, the Center for Disease Control and the building manager near phones throughout the mailroom ensures the numbers are on hand when there is an emergency. Also, they serve as a daily reminder that a threat could occur and that the team needs to be vigilant.

As long as terrorists have low cost and easy access to mail, all organizations must consider comprehensive mail screening an essential part of a security program. For more information on mail security best practices, SoBran can help.

SoBran SafeMail keeps your team safe and your operations running.

Every day, threatening letters and parcels land at corporate and government offices. Most are inconvenient. Some cause damage. A few change everything.

SoBran sets the standard for the design and operation of mail screening programs. We've been keeping clients safe from mail borne attacks since 2001, when we worked with the U.S. Army to develop and operate a facility to protect against Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and Explosive (CBRNE) mail threats.

Our expert team provides you with:

Onsite Screening Services

The SoBran team provides technical and operational support for mail screening facilities. We work from your location to perform visual screens, operate all screening equipment, and keep your mail operations running smoothly.

Offsite Screening Services

You don't have to allocate space or expose your team to potential threats. We pick up your mail, screen it at one of our offsite facilities, and deliver it promptly to your door. You'll receive your mail fully screened – on your timeline, regardless of your location.

Additional Services

- On-site risk analysis, system design, integration and implementation for mail screening programs
- Design of site-specific protocols for crisis communications, evacuation, and emergency action plans
- Compliance with 41 CFR, Department of Defense and OSHA safety programs
- Training to make sure your entire team – both inside and outside the mailroom – can identify and respond to mail borne threats.

SoBran INC.

SafeMail

SoBran, Inc.
2677 Prosperity Avenue, Suite 200 Fairfax, VA 22031 • 703.352.9511
SafeMail@SoBran-Inc.com • www.sobransafemail.com