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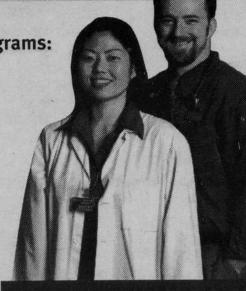
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Baffled by anthrax, officials start search for saliva on letters

By Ron Hutcheson

WASHINGTON (KRT) — Government officials voiced fear Sunday that more anthrax-tainted letters might be working their way through the postal system as investigators remained baffled about the source of the deadly mail.

"We don't know how many letters there might be. We don't have any evidence to believe there are lots of letters, but we are being very, very careful," White House chief of staff Andy Card said.

In a development that underscored the potential threat, the Centers for Disease Control confirmed Sunday that a New Jersey postal worker had contracted inhalation anthrax. The female victim worked at a major processing facility in Hamilton that handled contaminated letters sent to Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, NBC anchor Tom Brokaw and the New York Post. Another worker at the facility also is suspected to have inhalation anthrax.

It was the eighth confirmed case of inhalation anthrax, the deadliest form of the disease. Five other victims have contracted less serious anthrax skin infections. Three people have died from inhalation anthrax — two Washington postal workers and an employee at a tabloid newspaper in Florida.

Although Card repeatedly called the anthrax mailings a "terrorist attack," he acknowledged that federal investigators have no idea who is behind them. Three weeks after the first anthrax case surfaced in Florida, the FBI and the CIA have not agreed on which theory to pur-

Card disputed a Washington Post report that investigators believe that the mailings were the work of a domestic terrorist.

After a weekend with no reports of new anthrax outbreaks, authorities braced for the possibility that this week's mail could bring more bad news. Although postal officials have not found additional anthrax-tainted letters, they remained on guard.

Reports of suspicious letters and hoax calls have been pouring into the Postal Service at a rate of about 600 a day. There are only about 2,000 postal inspectors nationwide to handle the calls and to continue the anthrax investigation with the FBI.

Postal inspectors will seek more clues this week in the anthrax-tainted mail that was sent to Fort Detrick, Md., for testing, as well as in the truckloads of

other mail diverted from Congress to a plant in Lima, Ohio, to be decontaminated with electron beams normally used to sterilize hospital equipment.

Among other possible clues, investigators hope to get a DNA sample from a licked envelope or stamp.

In Miami, FBI spokeswoman Judy Orihuela said that tests for anthrax in cars that had been owned by two of the Sept. 11 hijackers came back negative. Mohamed Atta and Marwan al Shehhi sold the cars about a week before the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

To guard against future outbreaks, postal officials signed a \$40 million contract for equipment that sanitizes mail with electron beams, but it will not be delivered until November. The first machines will be installed in Washington.

Traces of the lethal bacteria have been found at remote mail centers serving the White House, the Supreme Court, the State Department and the CIA. Some contaminated House and Senate office buildings were expected to remain closed when Congress returned to work on Monday.

More than 20,000 postal workers, congressional aides and others who might have come in contact with anthrax have been given antibiotics to counteract the bacteria.

Card, the highest-ranking White House aide, used the Sunday talk show circuit to defend the Bush administration's handling of the anthrax scare. Critics contend that administration officials downplayed the seriousness of the threat, offered misleading information and were slow to protect postal workers.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., said the White House also gave the "appearance of a double standard" by moving swiftly to protect senior government workers while postal employees remained at risk.

Card said government officials are doing the best they can with the little information available to them.

"We have a brand new threat to this country that almost no one could have anticipated," he said. "The early days of any battle introduce what's called the fog of war, and we're still looking through that fog to find the truth."

Knight Ridder Newspapers correspondents Tony Pugh, Lenny Savino and Tom Avril contributed to this report. © 2001, Knight Ridder/Tribune Information Services.

University events

Wednesday, Oct. 31

Brown Bag: Center for the Study of Women in Society presents Connie Dickinson, linguistics graduate student, discussing "Star Woman and Female Shamans: The Representation of Women in Tsachi Narratives." Noon-1 p.m. 330 Hendricks. Free. For information, browse http://csws.uoregon.edu/ or call 346-5015.

Teach-in: Political science and ASUO present "After September 11" with Christine Kearney, Ronald Mitchell and Dennis Galvan of political science, leading a discussion on "The Clash of

Civilizations?" 3:30-5 p.m. 110 Fenton. Free. For information, browse http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~polisci/ teach-in/ or call 346-4626 or 346-4864.

Thursday, Nov. 1

ITC Workshop: Kathy Heerema presents "PowerPoint Basics," a workshop teaching how to create dynamic lectures or presentations with Microsoft PowerPoint. ITC workshops are open to faculty, staff, and currently enrolled students. Seating is available first come, first served. Free. 2-3:50 p.m. ITC Classroom, 267B Knight Library.