A. Purpose
The intent of this policy is to inform Columbia University staff sorting or handling mail how to recognize and respond to suspicious packages.

B. Applicability/Scope
This policy is applicable to staff that sorts/opens institutional mail. The policy incorporates the latest recommendations from Public Safety and the NYPD addressing the potential use of the mail for disseminating explosive devices or infectious/toxic agents. While the risk of encountering such a package is small, everyone should be aware of the indicators of and responses to a suspicious package. If unsure about the nature of a suspicious package immediately report it to your supervisor. The supervisor shall notify Public Safety. These first responders will perform a threat assessment of the situation and make decisions about further actions.

C. Definitions –N/A

D. Procedures
1. Recognition of Characteristics of Suspicious Packages
   The characteristics of suspicious packages may include:
   a. Inappropriate or unusual labeling
   b. Appearance and other suspicious signs such as
      i. Powdery substance felt through or appearing on the package or envelope
      ii. Oily stains or discolorations
      iii. Unusual odor
      iv. Lopsided, empty or uneven envelope
      v. Misspelled or incomplete addresses
      vi. No return address
      vii. Excessive postage
      viii. Excessive packaging such as tape, string, etc.
      ix. Excessive weight
      x. Ticking sound
      xi. Protruding wires or aluminum foil

2. Procedures for Suspicious Packages or Envelopes
   a. Place suspicious packages or envelopes down on a stable surface immediately; do not move or touch them further.
   b. Clear the immediate area of all persons and keep others away.
   c. Cordon off the immediate area.
   d. Contact first responders; Public Safety (CUMC: 212-305-7979; Morningside/Manhattanville: 212-854-5555) and your supervisor. At Lamont, call 845-359-2900; at Nevis, call 911.
   e. Instruct people to wash hands and other exposed skin with soap and water, if a wash station is in the immediate area
   f. Isolate exposed persons to a designated area away from the substance and await further instruction.
   g. List the names of the persons in the immediate area of the mail or package.
h. Remain available in a safe area to provide information to first responders.

i. Work with Public Safety to determine if local air supply should be temporarily shut down;

3. Locations That Receive Mail From University Mail Rooms
   a. Offices and laboratories may receive mail that regularly may have passed through initial screening at a University mail room. All mail recipients must remain vigilant for the suspicious package indicators noted above and for unexpected mail or mail with an absent or unfamiliar return addresses. Anyone who becomes suspicious of such a package should follow the “Procedures for Suspicious Packages or Envelopes”, described above.
   b. Recipients of packages directly from United Parcel Service (UPS), FedEx, etc. should also be aware of suspicious package indicators, particularly if the return address is absent or unfamiliar or the package is unexpected.

4. Optional Personal Protective Equipment Use for Routine Mail Handling
   Personnel handling mail opting to wear PPE should follow this guidance:
   a. Nitrile or vinyl (not latex) gloves, if worn, should be used only when sorting the mail.
   b. Remove gloves prior to performing other tasks.
   c. Wash hands with warm water and soap after handling mail.
   d. Do not eat or drink while handling mail.

E. Emergency contacts
   Public Safety - CUMC: 212-305-7979;
   Public Safety - Morningside/Manhattanville: 212-854-5555
   Nevis Laboratories: call 911

F. Medical Surveillance – N/A

G. Recordkeeping – N/A

H. Appendices

I. Forms – N/A

J. References – N/A

K. Acknowledgements (optional)