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Post Office offers Cipro to worried mail workers

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Nervous New York postal workers were given the option yesterday of taking the antibiotic Cipro if they feared they had been exposed to anthrax.

With tests still pending on Manhattan postal facilities that handled anthrax-laced mail, Post Office officials said they would provide a five-day supply of the drug to any employee who wanted it.

But postal union leaders continued to demand much broader action, including shutting down affected mail facilities and stepping up emergency plans to deal with any additional outbreaks.

"We don't think the Postal Service is doing everything they can do to help us," said William Smith, president of the 10,000-member New York Metro Area Postal Union.

Postal officials held a heated two-hour meeting yesterday with union leaders, who are mulling legal options to temporarily shut facilities they believe could be dangerous.

Anthrax tests have been performed at the Morgan postal facility on Ninth Ave. at 30th St., one of the city's biggest mail depots, and other stations where contaminated mail was handled. Results will be available later in the week, Smith said.

New York employees want better emergency planning to head off an anthrax crisis like the one that has killed two postal workers and sickened at least two others in Washington.

"Something should be done to minimize that kind of exposure," said Louie Nikolaidis, a lawyer for the union.

Checking death records

With anthrax fears building and more scares occurring daily, New Jersey health officials took the startling step of instructing coroners to double-check recent death reports for possible links to the lethal bacteria.

Andrew Tucker, a spokesman for the city Health Department, said he did not know whether city investigators would check the death rolls for possible anthrax links.

Postal union officials said they did not know of any suspicious deaths of New York mail workers in recent weeks.

Around the city, there were several more anthrax scares yesterday, including a second, at The New York Times and one that forced the evacuation of the British Consulate on Third Ave.

Officials calmly left the consulate office, which was closed for the day. Other companies in the building near E. 50th St. stayed open.

"They don't tell you anything," said Greg Stone, 44, a law firm researcher in the building. "That's what annoys me and scares me."

At The Times, a suspicious powder was found in a letter postmarked Glasgow, Scotland, that was opened in a mailroom about 8:30 a.m. Two employees in the room were tested for anthrax, but results will not be available for several days. The Times closed the mailroom and suspended mail delivery.

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