NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

WASHINGTON POST, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2001

Anthrax Scare Moves to Capitol Hill

Letter to Daschle Tested for Bacteria; ABC Worker's Son Has Disease in N.Y.

By Cecil Connolly and Helen Dewar
Washington Post Staff Writers

Preliminary tests of a letter opened yesterday in the offices of Senate Majority Leader Thomas A. Daschle (D-S.D.) showed traces of anthrax bacteria, bringing the threat of bioterrorism to the nation's capital.

Capitol Police, after conducting two tests on the suspicious material, quarantined Daschle's personal office, administered antibiotics to more than 40 of his staff members and temporarily stopped delivering mail to House and Senate buildings.

What began in Florida two weeks ago as a single case of the rare and often fatal disease has become an ever-widening investigation into confirmed incidents of anthrax exposure at five locations in two states and the District, as well as hundreds of hoaxes and false alarms around the world.

In New York, where officials already were investigating a case of cutaneous anthrax in an NBC News employee, the 7-month-old son of an ABC-TV employee was found yesterday to have that same, relatively mild form of the illness, transmitted through the skin. ABC News President David Westin said the child had visited the network's Manhattan offices Sept. 28 and that, although they did not know for sure, officials were operating under the assumption that the child had contracted the disease there. Westin said the child's "prognosis is excellent."

At the tabloid newspaper office in Florida where the first case was reported, a second man was found to have pulmonary anthrax, the far more serious variation caused by inhaling the bacteria. Last week, doctors said Ernesto Blanco, 73, had anthrax spores in his nasal passage but had not actually developed the disease. Yesterday, on the basis of new tests, health officials reported that Blanco has, indeed, developed anthrax but is on antibiotics and expected to recover. His coworker, Bob Stevens, 63, died of the illness Oct. 5.

In all three locations—Florida, New York and Capitol Hill—swab tests have been conducted on hundreds of people who may have been near the bacteria. Most of them are also preventatively taking the antibiotic ciprofloxacin.

Even as potential new cases arose, investigators were in the process of ruling out others that had been widely reported. Officials in Nevada and New Jersey, pursuing separate incidents of possible anthrax infection, said yesterday that all the individuals involved had tested negative.

That news did little to slow the onslaught of calls to emergency rescue teams. In New York City alone, from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. yesterday, police received 84 possible anthrax reports. The Planned Parenthood Federation of America said envelopes containing powdery substances arrived at 90 family planning offices and abortion clinics in 13 states.

No region or institution seemed immune from the anxiety. Newspaper offices, a bank in France, a U.S. Embassy in Australia, the nuclear authority in the Czech Republic and the headquarters of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services all reported deliveries of questionable substances.

"Our labs are going nuts testing all kinds of things: post office packages, drums of liquid, packages," said Scott Becker, a spokesman for the Association of Public Health Laboratories. "We are overwhelmed."

Although anthrax is not contagious, ready access to the bacteria and its potential to kill combine to make it the perfect tool for inflicting widespread fear, said Sen. Bill Frist (R-Tenn.), a physician.

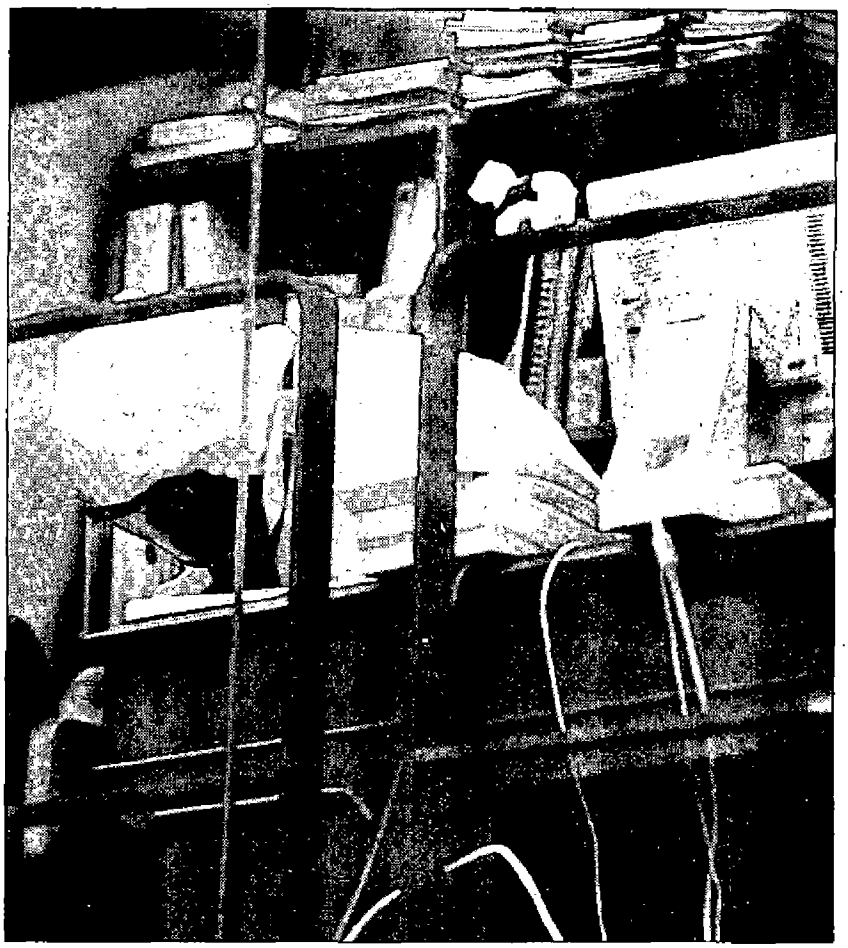
"Anthrax is in many ways the ideal terrorizing agent," he said. "The goal is to personalize the potential for harm, and clearly, that goal is being accomplished."

At about 10:30 a.m., a woman working in Daschle's personal office opened a heavily taped envelope, and a "powdery substance" fell out, Capitol Police Lt. Dan Nichols said at an afternoon news conference. She immediately called the

CITY_21MC100_011831050

NYC-WTC_000413433

NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document



BY KENNETH LAMBERT—ASSOCIATED PRESS

A worker conducts an inspection on the floor where Senate Majority Leader Thomas A. Daschle's mail is handled after tests found traces of anthrax in a letter opened in his office.

police and the Capitol physician, he said.

The material was sent to an Army laboratory at Fort Detrick for conclusive testing, the results of which should be available today, Nichols said.

"We hope within 24 hours we'll have a positive indication of what we're dealing with," he said.

The large, heavily taped envelope, dated Oct. 9, came from a postal distribution center in Trenton, N.J., according to the FBI. The contaminated mail sent to NBC had the same postmark.

There was growing evidence yesterday that the first anthrax outbreak at Blanco's tabloid newspaper office may also have come through the mail. Florida's Department of Health said it had found anthrax spores in a nonpublic mail sorting area of Boca Raton's main post office.

Nichols declined to identify the woman who opened the envelope in Daschle's office, which spreads over the fifth and sixth floors of the Hart Office Building, about a block from the Capitol. Daschle said his office was closed and quarantined, with no one allowed either in or out, for several hours.

John Eisold, the Capitol physician, said about 50 members of Daschle's staff, police officers, mail handlers and others who may have been exposed to the substance in the letter were receiving antibiotics.

Daschle was in a different office that he maintains at the Capitol when the letter was opened, and he was unable to go to his Hart office because of the quarantine. He said he talked with staff members by telephone but had not been able to talk to the woman who opened the letter, although he spoke to a member of her family.

"I would say without equivocation our staff feel very confident about their circumstances, and they've been given assurances . . . that there is no immediate danger for them, given the fact that we were able to respond as quickly and as directly as we could," he said.

As he opened the Senate for business, Daschle said the incident would not interfere with normal operations. "The Senate, this institution, will not stop. We will not cease our business, we will continue to work," he said.

Yet all around him, procedures were changing.

Capitol tours were suspended. Federal agencies announced plans to tighten the handling of their mail, and the U.S. Postal Service prepared to send a warning about biological hazards to every mailing address in the country—135 million in all.

At the Capitol, overall security will continue to be tightened, Nichols said. "This is not something that's going to be one isolated incident," he said. "I think you're going to find that security within the Capitol complex is going to change."

Meanwhile, six Planned Parenthood facilities in the Washington area received letters signed by the Army of God, a little-known group that advocates violence against abortion providers. According to local Planned Parenthood spokeswoman Virginia Martin, each letter said: "You have been exposed to anthrax. We are going to kill all of you. From the Army of God, Virginia Dare Chapter."

President Bush was the first to deliver the news of the latest outbreak, announcing to reporters after a meeting with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi that Daschle's office had received a piece of mail containing white powder.

"His office received a letter, and it had anthrax in it," Bush said after talking on the telephone with the majority leader. "The letter was field-tested. And the staffers that have been exposed are being treated."

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) scheduled a meeting for Wednesday with pharmaceutical and biotech executives to discuss the prospects of speeding up production of vaccines and antibiotics that may be used to treat harmful biological agents.

Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson, who was traveling in Texas yesterday, announced Sunday that he wants an additional $643 million to expand the National Pharmaceutical Stockpile. Part of that money would be spent purchasing enough anthrax antibiotics to treat 12 million people for the recommended 60-day course. The United States currently has medicine for 2 million people.

CITY_21MC100_011831051

NYC-WTC_000413434