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Bioterrified N.Y.ers keep police busy

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With anthrax fears spreading, jittery New Yorkers flooded authorities with dozens of calls yesterday about suspicious packages and powders in schools, offices and train stations.

Police got 82 calls about bioterror scares — including one about a powder-filled letter that shut part of a Harlem school, and a report of powder on the tracks that closed a busy subway line in Queens at rush hour.

Four workers at the New York Post were tested for possible anthrax exposure, but the paper refused to say what prompted the scare.

Teams of police and firefighters recovered 24 letters or packages in all, many of which included small amounts of baby powder or detergent.

"I think we should really say to everyone to really calm down," Mayor Giuliani said. "Things are not getting worse. It just depends on what you choose to focus on."

He invited reporters to watch him open some of the stacks of admiring letters that have poured into City Hall since the World Trade Center attacks Sept. 11.

He laughed at one hand-scrawled letter — which, like the rest of the mayor's mail, is screened by dogs and X-ray machines. "This looks like the usual stuff I get," joked Giuliani.

So far, an assistant to NBC anchorman Tom Brokaw is the only confirmed case of anthrax in New York.

Tests are pending on another NBC employee, who may have been exposed to the germ and has flulike symptoms.

Powder scare at school

On the first full work day since news of the NBC anthrax case broke Friday, authorities were kept busy from early morning on with calls about bioterror fears.

In Harlem, teacher Vladimir Kundel got the scare of his life.

He was in the fourth-floor teachers lounge of Public School 194 on W. 144th St. shortly after 9 a.m. when he tore open a thick white envelope and white powder flew out.

"Poof. I opened it up and it puffed out on the table. A little got on me," Kundel, 34, said last night from his Brooklyn home.

He and another teacher ran out of the room, and Principal Nina Powell called police.

Police cleaned the lounge and seized the envelope for testing. Students were evacuated from the fourth floor.

Kundel was tested for anthrax and given antibiotics as a precaution.

Parent Wanda Davis was upset that her 8-year-old son, Carl, was inside the school without a mask as workers arrived in protective gear.

"Until I hear he's safe, he's not going back to that school," said Davis, 43. "He's my only son."

Subway service suspended

Subway trains along busy Queens Blvd. were suspended shortly before 7 a.m. when a powdery substance was spotted on the tracks at the Grand Ave. station. Parts of the E, F, Q and G lines were shut down until about 7:30 a.m., when firefighters determined there was no danger.

At Penn Station, officials cordoned off a 30-by-60-foot area after a patch of white powder was found around 7:30 a.m.

"Before, you never had to think twice about what you might encounter on your way to work," said Tor DeVries, 27, of Brooklyn. "This is just a little nerve-wracking."

The Post became the latest media outlet to be caught up in the fear over anthrax. Sources at the paper said the workers were tested after they experienced flulike symptoms. One test was negative, and the rest were pending.

Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik warned that many of the reports involved hoaxes. He vowed to jail anyone caught sending threatening letters or frightening powder.

"People think that it may be amusing," he said. "The people that do that will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, hoax or not, real anthrax or not."

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