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Tackling subway anthrax scares

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Frustrated subway riders may soon win some relief from the daily delays and train reroutings caused by anthrax scares.

Transit Bureau police have formed their own units to be able to more quickly check out reports of suspicious substances in subway stations, trains and rail yards, Chief Michael Ansbro said.

Every day, teams of NYPD special operations officers and Fire Department hazardous materials personnel respond to scores of such reports across the city.

Transit police units would lighten the workload by handling all the cases in the system.

"The train delays will be shortened," Ansbro said. "Our guys should be able to get there quicker."

Response teams collect suspicious powder for laboratory testing and clean affected areas with bleach and water. The new transit units, certified by the Environmental Protection Agency, are expected to start work Nov. 19.

The subway system is hit with an average of nine reports a day of suspicious substances. None has turned out to be dangerous.

On Thursday, there were 11 reports, including one at Columbus Circle that halted downtown A, B, C and D service from 145th St. to 34th St. for 70 minutes.

Yesterday morning, W trains were running on local tracks after suspicious powder was reported on a train at Canal St. that was held in the station for 40 minutes.

Gene Russianoff of the Straphangers Campaign praised the initiative. "There's a need to protect the riding public and address the horrendous delays and disruptions," he said.

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