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ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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November 7, 2001

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The Honorable David M. Walker  
Comptroller General  
U.S. General Accounting Office  
441 G St NW  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

We are writing to request GAO's assistance in analyzing the challenges that face the Postal Service in responding to the recent anthrax attacks.

Prior to the recent anthrax attacks, the Postal Service had not prepared plans to respond to a bioterrorist attack using the mail. As a result, the agency has the extraordinarily difficult challenge of drafting emergency plans in the midst of coping with the current crisis. We believe timely GAO input will help to ensure that the Postal Service takes the right steps in meeting this challenge and ensuring the safety of the mail for both customers and postal workers.

Our first request is for guidance on what kind of planning and analysis the Postal Service should be undertaking at this moment to respond to the current crisis. We would like your advice on:

- Whether the Postal Service should be considering "low-tech" approaches that could reduce the volume of mail needing sterilization, such as steps that could reduce the anonymity of a significant portion or certain types of mail;
- Whether there are other options for safeguarding the mail from biological attack besides, or in addition to, sterilization that the Postal Service should be considering;
- What kind of analysis of direct costs (such as capital costs, operational costs, and energy costs) and indirect costs (such as impacts on certain types of mail) the Postal Service should currently be performing;
- What kind of additional analyses, if any, the Postal Service should be undertaking;
- Whether the Postal Service should currently be seeking assistance from experts inside and outside of the government in planning its response and, if so, who the Postal Service should be seeking assistance from.

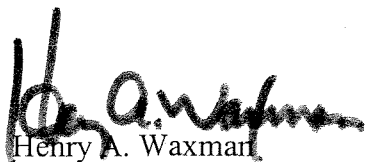
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Our second request is for an evaluation of what is known about the various technologies that the Postal Service may consider using to sanitize the mail. We would like to know basic facts about these technologies, such as how they are used today, what quantities of materials they are currently sterilizing, what they cost, their record of reliability, whether they pose dangers to workers or consumers, and how long it takes to install and commence operating these technologies. If it is possible, we would also like GAO to describe or evaluate the engineering and logistical challenges in applying these technologies to mail.


These requests are extremely urgent, both because the Postal Service is in the process of formulating its response plan and because Congress may soon act on these issues. We request a response to the first request by November 9. We would like the basic assessment contained in the second request by November 16. We recognize that the more detailed evaluation envisioned in the second request may take somewhat longer to address. Nevertheless, we would like at least a preliminary response to the second request by December 7.

We look forward to discussing these issues with you in greater detail.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman  
Ranking Minority Member  
Committee on Government Reform



Danny K. Davis  
Ranking Minority Member  
Subcommittee on Civil Service and  
Agency Organization