

CDC's custodianship of lethal organisms leaks like the TSA, but worse

By ACSH Staff — June 3, 2015



Oops, they did it again. Remember, not so long ago ([June of 2014](#)

[1] to be precise), the CDC announced that an investigation had uncovered the possible exposure of 80 or more of its scientists and staff to anthrax spores. The precise course of events leading to the exposure or its discovery have not been made public nor the reason for a several day delay in alerting the entire CDC community to the potential danger. The CDC's head, Dr. Tom Frieden, published a letter but it gave no actual explanation at the time, and only promised to tighten up procedures and microbial security.

Fast forward to July of that same year (not so fast or you'll speed right past it). This time, it was our stewards at the NIH who discovered an old box of...guess what?...nope, [smallpox this time](#) [2], good old *Variola major*, ages-old scourge beaten down gradually over the centuries beginning with Edward Jenner in 1792 and completed sort of in 1980. These preserves were decades old and forgotten, until someone working for the FDA (which had its own lab in the recesses of the NIH in Bethesda) came upon some old cardboard boxes of it. Yes, really! If you don't believe me, read what ACSH's own Dr. Josh Bloom had to say about it in his hilarious (well if you don't laugh you have to cry) [post entitled](#) [3], Smallpox in a Big Box With No Locks, on Science 2.0.

Still not amused at least those of you who enjoy dark humor? Enter yet **another** Federal agency, this one (at least) not well known for health and science oversight (or so we thought): the Dept. of Defense admitted earlier this week that someone in an Army lab in Utah had sent [deadly anthrax spores](#) [4] to *who knows how many different recipients in several states...and countries.*

Here's the best part: *The Pentagon Force Protection Agency, which serves as the security force for the building, received the anthrax. PFPA uses such spores to test its biosecurity measures, a defense official said. **But the spores are supposed to be dead. This sample contained live spores.***

Officials have yet to confirm whether the actual shipment sent to the Pentagon contained live spores or not, a senior defense official told The Daily Beast. This official could not say when the

anthrax arrived, or how much had entered the building.(emphasis added).

It's the kind of confusion that's become commonplace as word of this anthrax distribution continues to spread. Department spokesman Army Col. Steven Warren acknowledged in a briefing with reporters Tuesday that an ongoing investigation found some live anthrax went to two laboratories in Canada and one in Washington state, making the third country and 12th U.S. state to receive the potentially deadly bacteria. Warren would not say where the shipments went to in Canada, even as he said Canadian officials had been notified a day earlier. And Pentagon officials anticipate more states and countries could emerge as anthrax recipients '

ACSH s Dr. Gil Ross said this: Uh-oh. All Dispatch readers need to check their refrigerators and freezers to see if they ve received a suspicious package from an Army Lab in Utah. Or anywhere. Seriously, these mishaps (using the kindest word I can think of) along with the recent news that the TSA was successful only **3 percent of the time** in detecting potential explosives and weapons smuggled on planes from an agency-sponsored sting operation makes me (and should make you) lose faith in our federal government s ability to keep us safe. I have no solution, since I doubt other governments are any better but at least they are less likely to be harboring deadly microbial threats. Except for maybe Russia, Iran, and ISIS.

One last thing: given his overall level of incompetence, indeed malfeasance, in every area, I again call for the firing of the CDC s Tom Frieden.

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Links

[1] <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/06/24/us-usa-anthrax-scare-idUSKBN0EZ1WI20140624>

[2] http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/smallpox-vials-found-in-storage-room-of-nih-campus-in-bethesda/2014/07/08/bfdc284a-06d2-11e4-8a6a-19355c7e870a_story.html

[3] http://www.science20.com/pfired_but_still_kicking/smallpox_in_a_big_box_with_no_locks-140269

[4] <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/06/02/pentagon-doesn-t-know-where-anthrax-went.html?via=newsletter&source=CSPMeditation>