

The Virgin Islands Consortium

FBI Has Suspect In White Powdery Substance Case That Shuttered Federal Building, Other Institutions

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ST. THOMAS -- The Ron DeLugo Federal building here was on lockdown -- as well as at least four other institutions both public and private -- between Tuesday morning and late Wednesday following the revelation that envelopes containing a white, powdery substance had been sent via mail to these institutions from an anonymous sender.

The situation saw a myriad of first responder units responding to what was being treated as a hazmat situation, which saw multiple persons being quarantined. The FBI, VIPD, VITEMA, and the National Guard 23rd Civil Support Team coordinated and conducted various stages of response to the incidents, according to a press release Government House issued Wednesday.

FBI Public Information Officer from the San Juan Office Carlos Osorio made known that the substance, first thought to be anthrax, was not hazardous.

Also on Wednesday, Eric Oram, a federal postal agent, alleged through documents filed at the District Court here that the envelopes sent to the federal building were sent by Eugenia Winston, a St. Thomas resident. Ms. Winston later confirmed to authorities that she was the one who sent the envelopes.

According to the Government House release, the 911 emergency call center received notification of the incident at about 12:38 p.m. Tuesday. Upon arrival to the scene, fire personnel were met by the judiciary security inspector who escorted them to the third floor where the exposure had occurred and exposed personnel remained isolated.

Shortly after going to the third floor, Fire Service personnel returned to the exterior of the building where they remained on standby until the third floor had been cleared and the individuals who had been quarantined there were given clearance to leave.

At 4:23 p.m., while the crew at the federal building was still on standby, another fire crew was dispatched to the Law Office of Bennett Chan, where three individuals had also been exposed to a white, powdery substance. This crew remained on standby at the scene until it was determined the substance was not hazardous and the individuals exposed were cleared to leave.

Aside from the federal building, envelopes containing the powdery substance were sent to a Scotiabank branch in Altona on Wednesday, the offices of two attorneys (including Mr. Chen's), as well as a post office branch.

Feature Image: Ron De Lugo Federal Building