

Parcel systems — private, commercial, or the U.S. Postal Service — are extremely popular for the transportation of narcotics among drug traffickers. Drug traffickers and drug trafficking organizations have used this method of transportation for a number of years. The transportation of narcotics using various parcel systems has been exploited, and it continues to be a popular method of transportation, because it is relatively safe and inexpensive.

These parcel systems are occasionally monitored by law enforcement, but in most cases, not enough. This type of investigation is difficult to prove and takes extensive investigative effort. This chapter will outline and provide an introduction to parcel investigations as an investigative tool. Parcel task force groups will be explained in detail along with their role in the investigation of organizations using parcel systems. Parcel facilities will be described, as well as instructions for training parcel staff in the detection of individuals using commercial package locations to ship narcotics. Commercial staff will be trained in the behavior and characteristics of criminal activity displayed by traffickers while using the parcel system to facilitate the drug trade. Investigative techniques such as controlled deliveries and the use of tracking devices will be discussed in detail.

What is Drug Parcel Interdiction?

Drug traffickers and drug trafficking organizations are constantly looking for ways to facilitate their drug trade. One that is relatively safe is the parcel/package system, which they use to ship narcotics from around the globe. Law enforcement agencies throughout the United States have established drug parcel groups to aggressively target and monitor local area shippers and receivers of narcotics through commercial packaging systems. In addition, they monitor outgoing parcels and regularly monitor private parcel systems.

The parcel interdiction group is a team responsible for investigating drug traffickers using commercial and private parcel systems to facilitate drug trafficking. In cooperation with the U.S. Postal Inspector's Office, federal, state, and local law enforcement has partnered with these groups to monitor the flow of narcotics via the U.S. Postal Service and other commercial carriers. Cooperation with management and security personnel (loss prevention) with private parcel shipping companies is essential in establishing and maintaining a successful drug parcel investigative group. A drug parcel investigative group is generally part of an overall interdiction group within a police agency. Branches of federal law enforcement such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the U.S. Customs Service cooperate with local law enforcement to investigate these types of cases. Historically, there has been a good working relationship between these entities.

How Do We Get Started?

What can law enforcement do to combat individuals and organizations using the parcel systems to transport and ship narcotics? It is not always easy. Millions of parcels and packages are shipped throughout the world on a daily basis. Trying to segregate those parcels which contain narcotics is a difficult task, to say the least. There are a number of investigative efforts that can be used in this environment.

First and foremost, a properly trained drug canine team needs to be in place to conduct these types of operations. Without such a resource, parcel cases are virtually impossible to make. The drug canine is the ultimate instrument in the development of probable cause for the opening of a suspected drug parcel. The canine should be a single-purpose drug dog whose handler trains in the parcel/package environment.

There are three different types of business which law enforcement should seek out when establishing a parcel interdiction group. First is the commercial private system, such as the United Parcel Service (UPS), Federal Express, Airborne Express, DHL Worldwide Express, and other freight services such as Roadway and Yellow Freight Company. Then there are the independent parcel companies including franchises such as Pac n'Send, Mail Boxes Etc., Zip-N-Ship, and others. The U.S. Postal Service is the third type of parcel business that we will be exploring for suspicious activity.

With respect to the U.S. Postal Service, state and local law enforcement officials must deal with the U.S. Postal Inspector's Office, which has primary jurisdiction over all U.S. mail. The U.S. Postal Inspector's Office works closely with other federal agencies, including the U.S. Customs Service, which inspects parcels and other cargo entering the borders of the United

States. State and local law enforcement, as well as federal authorities, do not have jurisdiction in the investigation of narcotics shipped through the U.S. Postal Service.

The U.S. Postal Inspector has a number of offices located throughout the United States. The Postal Inspector's Service monitors parcels through its system and can provide historical information on previous parcels delivered to a particular location. It also has tracking capabilities of anticipated suspect drug parcels. The U.S. Postal Inspector's Office works closely with state and local law enforcement to conduct joint operations, including controlled deliveries. If a state or local law enforcement does not have a relationship with respect to a drug parcel unit, the Postal Inspector's Service is a good partner that can assist in drug parcel operations. When forming a drug parcel squad, the law enforcement agency should reach out to the Postal Inspector's Office for the purpose of partnering in investigations.

Commercial private systems are typically extremely cooperative with law enforcement in drug parcel investigations. Drug parcel groups should approach company management and the loss prevention officer to initiate a program.

Independent parcel companies, which are franchise companies, generally provide services for small business needs such as packing and shipping, and providing business addresses. These small postal service centers are extremely popular locations for drug traffickers to send and receive drug parcels. Many of these facilities have mailbox rentals available.

Training Commercial and Independent Parcel Staff

Commercial Private Parcel Systems

Commercial private parcel systems are familiar with law enforcement's role in investigating narcotics that are shipped through their facilities. These companies are very cooperative in providing law enforcement with the facility and staff to conduct investigations. Concerns of private parcel systems are disruption of business and losing employee service because of criminal court hearings.

Typically, law enforcement will approach the management and loss prevention officer to initiate a cooperative program. As previously noted, commercial private systems are very familiar with investigative interdiction efforts to intercept suspected parcels. If the agency is interested in establishing a proactive program, they will usually deal mostly with the loss prevention officer, who in many cases is a former law enforcement officer.

The investigator should meet with the facility manager and the loss prevention officer and present a letter of commitment (Figure 10.1a). The letter

Use of Agency Letterhead

The Agency Name is seeking your assistance in establishing a Narcotics Interdiction Program designed to have a direct impact on the commercial package delivery service community.

We are currently living in a very technical society where people are constantly utilizing various methods of distribution/delivery of packages for business and pleasure. The business and general community is the foundation of the commercial packaging business.

Unfortunately, as the general public has become more sophisticated, so has the criminal element within our society. These people have found an alternative method of transporting narcotics or other illicit items utilizing the commercial package delivery systems. By constantly using these methods, it is more difficult for law enforcement to detect and apprehend them. The majority of these individuals are professional criminals who derive most or all of their income through criminal activity. These activities include narcotics trafficking, credit card fraud, stolen property and transportation of weapons, etc. Many will commit any crime of opportunity.

These criminal types directly use the commercial packaging transportation services while conducting their illicit activities. It is the intention of the Narcotics Interdiction Program to make you aware of the problem we face and to enlist the cooperation of our package delivery service community in (City or County Name). It is the aim of the Narcotics Interdiction Program to detect and apprehend these subjects through the help of the package delivery community. These people are bad for business and detrimental to the general community.

There are indicators, which will assist you in the detection of potential criminal activity occurring in and around your business.

Notification should be made to law enforcement in the interest of security and with the welfare of your employees in mind. In providing information, you are not acting as a police agent, but a concerned citizen.

Customers who exhibit one or more of the activities listed may or may not be engaged in criminal activity. The Agency Name requests that the only action you take is to observe and report those things seen during the course of your normal duties. It is the responsibility of trained law enforcement officers to evaluate your information and take appropriate action.

The investigator presenting this letter can offer a more comprehensive explanation of the Narcotics Interdiction Program.

Your assistance in this matter is greatly appreciated and be assured that any information you provided will be handled in a confidential manner.

Sincerely,

(Signature of Agency Head)

Figure 10.1a

of commitment establishes that the police agency is seeking the assistance of the commercial parcel service in the detection of parcels containing illicit substances. Additionally, a list of indicators (Figure 10.1b) should be attached to the letter of commitment to assist commercial package service employees in the detection of potential criminal activity. With this information, the staff is not acting as an agent of the police, but as a concerned citizen. The letter requests that notification be made to one of the law enforcement personnel

Confidential

The attached list of indicators has been prepared to assist commercial postal/package service employees in the detection of potential criminal activity that may occur in or around your business.

In providing information, you are not acting as an agent of Agency Name, but as a concerned citizen. Notification should be made to one of the law enforcement personnel listed below in the interest of security and with the welfare of yourselves and the guests in mind.

Your assistance in these endeavors will be greatly appreciated.

To Report Suspected Criminal Activity – call Pager Number, which is a digital pager. Your call will be returned immediately.

Narcotics Interdiction Unit

List Officer names including Office Phone Numbers, Pager Numbers and any other numbers used for contact.

Figure 10.1b

listed on the attachment to report suspected criminal activity. A telephone number, generally a pager number, is provided with the contact list.

The focus of this type of group is access to the facility in order to conduct random examinations of incoming and outgoing parcels. Additionally, law enforcement would like access to parcel tracking information and any other information that a staff member (manager, driver, or loss prevention officer) may have concerning a suspicious package. The investigator should review all police operations with the parcel facility and management with respect to controlled deliveries and using the loss prevention officer. Deployment of a drug canine team should be discussed as well as the expectations of management and law enforcement. An arrangement may be outlined with regard to how the drug canine will be deployed within the facility, or if a suspected parcel is identified, how the drug canine team will operate. All of these areas should be discussed. The 24-hour contact telephone number for parcel management employees shall be provided to the location. Training of staff will be outlined with facility management.

Staff members to be trained should include management, counter clerks, drivers, and loss prevention personnel. Many of the facilities have counter operations where individuals can pick up and drop off parcels for delivery. These facilities typically have meetings either weekly or monthly. This is a good format in which the training can be facilitated.

Freight Companies

Another source that drug traffickers use to ship narcotics is freight companies. Freight companies typically transport larger quantities of freight than the other commercial facilities may not transfer. Freight companies such as

Roadway and Yellow Freight Company as well as other independent freight companies may be approached to cooperate with law enforcement.

Independent Franchise Parcel Companies

Independent franchise parcel companies such as Pac n' Send, Mail Boxes Etc., and others are excellent sources for law enforcement in cooperation with other facilities to assist in identifying drug traffickers. Independent parcel companies should be contacted in the same manner as commercial facilities and freight companies. The owner-operator or manager should be provided with information with respect to their cooperation. A letter of commitment can be provided and management and staff should be trained in the process and the indicators of behavior. Franchise meetings are common, and this would be a good time to provide training to the facility as well as other locations. Depending on the police agency's jurisdiction, there may be multiple independent parcel facilities in the area.

These locations typically handle over-the-counter drop-off and pick-up of parcels. Independent facilities provide mailbox rental, packing materials, and other services related to the mailing of packages. Mailbox services are available and are popular among drug traffickers and their organizations due to the anonymity that this affords. This type of service enables drug traffickers to avoid delivery of parcels containing narcotics to their residences.

Once the facilities have been contacted and agree to cooperate with law enforcement, training is scheduled, in which the program is explained in its entirety and staff is asked to be the "eyes and ears" for law enforcement. If the behavior of a subject and suspicious parcel are identified, the staff is asked to observe and report the information to law enforcement, and take no action. Witness testimony is at times unavoidable; however, steps can be taken to avoid it. The staff should be advised to avoid opening suspect parcels. Once a package is opened, it is virtually unavoidable to not use staff as witnesses for testimony. Law enforcement should not direct any staff person from these facilities to open a parcel for them. If they were to do this, they would become an agent of the police; this action should be avoided.

Staff should be provided with parcel indicator guidelines that outline the behavior of an individual who may be sending a parcel containing narcotics. Additionally, the guidelines will provide information about certain characteristics observed on a parcel that might contain contraband or large amounts of currency. It should be explained to parcel staff that no one indicator alone should be considered significant, but if there are several indications observed, these should be reported to law enforcement for further examination. Multiple indicators of the sender or parcel observed should be considered suspect and subject to an examination by the drug canine team.

Indicators of Possible Criminal Activity

Let us examine some of the possible indicators of criminal activity with respect to parcel investigations. These indicators are not all-inclusive; however, they have been found to be typical of the behavior and conduct of individuals who are using parcel systems to facilitate drug transportation. This behavior is typically identified during a face-to-face encounter at a commercial and independent parcel service. Observation is typically made at the counter when an individual is shipping or receiving parcels. Some of these indicators of possible criminal activity are:

- Sender displays nervous tendencies
- Sender asks many questions as to the details of the delivery of parcel
- Sender information is fictitious
- Receiver address may not be correct; for example, a vacant lot or vacant residence
- Receiver name may be fictitious
- Handwritten or typed airbills
- Handwritten or typed labels; business-to-business labels.
- Sender requests next-day air delivery and will pay a higher rate without question
- New boxes
- Contents are not what is described
- Unusual contents described
- Sender arrives late or very close to closing time to mail parcel
- Sender calls facility to see what time it closes
- Sender is a first-time customer
- Sender has a continuous pattern of suspicious activity
- Mailbox rental receives parcels from source area and no other mail
- Parcel addressed from individual to individual or business to business
- Sender appears rushed and nervous, and provides contradictory information about the parcel
- Strong odor emanating from parcel, possible masking agents
 - Scented dryer sheets
 - Mustard
 - Axle grease
 - Foam insulation
 - Motor oil
- Parcel box flaps heavily glued
- Incorrect zip code
- Surveillance of location by receiver of a parcel
- Cash and corporate labels utilized
- Overall suspicious behavior of sender or receiver

This list of indicators has been compiled to provide the investigator with information about indicators of possible criminal activity. A person may enter a commercial or independent facility to send a suspicious parcel and display a number of these characteristics. The information should be provided to law enforcement by staff for further investigation. Staff must be able to pinpoint and articulate this behavior.

An individual who asks many questions about parcel delivery such as the exact time of delivery may be suspect. Fictitious sender information such as name, address, and telephone number is common because the sender does not want to be identified. Receiver address may not be correct, for example, a vacant lot or an unoccupied residence that may be for sale. The trafficker may be waiting at a vacant residence that is for sale or at a residence that is not theirs that they are just using for a delivery. There may have been surveillance to confirm this. A vacant lot or vacant residence is a common delivery destination, where the delivery driver may drive by and a person would flag him down, asking him if he had a package for that location.

With respect to the airbill or ground bill labels, trends change. Written labels should be examined carefully for fictitious information or other erroneous information. A typed label is suspicious because most commercial parcel systems have label machines for business customers to use. Federal Express has a “power ship label” that can be used by businesses that do a high volume of parcel sending. Investigators should look for parcels sent from independent shipping companies, because many drug traffickers use an address from an independent location but use a fictitious name to send a parcel. A trafficker may send a drug parcel business-to-business, person-to-person, person-to-business, or business-to-person to try to legitimize the package.

Typically, individuals using the parcel system use new boxes, which are common in packaging narcotics. There may be an indication of masking agents. Some common masking agents are scented dryer sheets, axle grease, motor oil, mustard, baby oil, fruit, and peanut butter.

When sending a parcel either through a commercial over-the-counter or independent counter, the drug trafficker may request next-day air delivery at a higher rate. This package typically is guaranteed delivery either at 9:00 a.m. or 10:00 a.m., next-day air. Traffickers may also use ground freight that may take 1 to 2 days. They use different delivery times to confuse law enforcement. Ground freight (1–2 day) has recently become popular. The trafficker may come in late to mail a parcel or call just before the facility closes, so the parcel will not be in the facility for a long period where it could possibly be monitored and examined by law enforcement.

A customer may have a continuous pattern of suspicious activity in sending parcels. He may be coming in weekly or have some other pattern.

A trafficker may be a first time customer and act suspicious. He may appear rushed, nervous, and provide contradictory information about the parcel. The clerk may ask if the customer would like to insure the package. Whether or not the package is insured by the trafficker may indicate that the package contains an item that one would normally not pay a higher rate to send, such as a video or documents, for example. The return address or ZIP code may be incorrect.

If the parcel is a box, the box flaps are often heavily glued. The drug trafficker may feel that this will keep the box from opening easily or breaking during delivery.

In some cases, surveillance by the receiver is conducted either at the facility or a drop location that the parcel is to be delivered to.

It is important that the agency share intelligence with other groups about how trafficking organizations are operating, specific method of operations, and other information that would be helpful.

Random Examinations of Parcels

Once parcel staff has been trained to conduct operations on sorting facilities and independent operational locations, investigators may utilize a drug canine team to conduct random examinations at these facilities. In the case of independent operations, the canine team may routinely conduct random examinations of parcels. This process can be done quietly in areas away from the public. Typically, when a parcel is received at the facility, it is placed in a routing area with other parcels. The canine team can be deployed to examine parcels at the location. Outgoing and incoming parcels may be examined. In random examinations at sorting facilities such as UPS, Federal Express, and Airborne, investigators may conduct visual examinations of parcels, later segregating those parcels for examination by the canine team. It is not recommended that the drug dog be placed on a sorting belt for examination of parcels. The dog will lose interest if “loaded” parcels (parcels with drugs) are not placed for it to find, or the dog will tire after a time.

Suspicious parcels should be segregated for the canine team to examine. When the canine team advises the investigator that the dog has alerted for the odor of narcotics in a suspected parcel, an investigation commences. An outgoing parcel investigation should be conducted to verify sender information such as name, address, and telephone number. Probable cause necessary to obtain a search warrant for the parcel is developed in this way. It may be

necessary for investigators to verify location by driving by the address. A sender address may not exist or may be part of a large apartment complex with no apartment number. The sender name must be verified, and typically is a common name or does not exist as it relates to a particular address and telephone number.

At this time, investigators should notify the law enforcement agency in the jurisdiction the parcel is being sent to, in order to discuss the receiver information in their jurisdiction. Outgoing parcels are typically from source cities or states or from an area from which currency may be sent to purchase drugs. The receiver law enforcement agency should conduct an investigation on the name and address. Typically, the name of the receiver is fictitious or is a variation of the true name of the receiver. The address is generally correct, because the sender wants the package to be delivered. However, the location may be a “drop” location or a residence where the receiver may be waiting for the parcel to be delivered. There may be information from the other law enforcement regarding the location to which the parcel is addressed. Intelligence information or other criminal investigations may reveal the location to be a known drug house.

With a package that is to be delivered from business to business or individual to business, the law enforcement agency should conduct a thorough investigation as to ownership and management of that location. There have been cases where, for example, a clerk at a convenience food store has used that location to receive narcotics via a parcel. The package was addressed to the convenience store, and the employee was awaiting delivery of the parcel.

If law enforcement agencies determine that the information on the sender side is fictitious, coupled with the canine alert on the parcel, probable cause would exist to obtain a search warrant. The local jurisdiction the parcel is located in would prepare a search warrant and have a magistrate or judge sign it for purposes of opening the suspected parcel. Before removing the parcel for the purpose of obtaining a search warrant, a parcel facility should be provided with a receipt for the item. The receipt should include the facility name, location, package type, and the date and time that the parcel was taken into custody, along with a police case number. There should be a description of the parcel or parcels. The receipt should be signed by the person releasing the property and by the investigator. A copy of this property receipt form should be provided to the facility for their records and also be kept as part of the case file.

Parcels from commercial parcel services can be tracked via the Internet or by telephone. With a tracking number, a package can be tracked to its destination and where it is currently located. The package may leave a location to go to a hub area, and be distributed from that location. Management or loss prevention personnel of the facility should be asked to

make a computer entry in their system so that if the drug trafficker checks the parcel by tracking number, it is not reflected that the parcel was taken into police custody. This should be discussed, and the tracking may reflect that there was some sort of sorting problem and that the parcel is at a particular location. This is extremely important with overnight parcels, as time is critical in the delivery of the parcel, which makes it very difficult to conduct a controlled delivery in a timely fashion.

Once probable cause is developed and a search warrant is obtained and signed, the parcel may be opened for examination by the law enforcement agency. It should be opened carefully so as to not damage the parcel in its original state. Once the interior of the parcel has been examined for the verification of narcotics, the investigators may take a sample of the contents before delivery in case the parcel is destroyed during the controlled delivery. The parcel should be closed and placed in another parcel, initialed, and dated. It can then be sent through the parcel system to the investigators conducting the controlled delivery in the destination jurisdiction. A copy of the search warrant that was executed on the parcel should be made available to the receiving agency. This will assist in preparing an anticipatory search warrant in preparation for the controlled delivery of the parcel to a residence or business. All investigative documents should be forwarded to the agency as well.

A police agency that has a parcel investigative group in another jurisdiction may contact your agency to ask if you would like to receive a package that has been identified with narcotics. The same steps are taken in preparing for your agency to conduct a controlled delivery in your jurisdiction. Typically, the other law enforcement agency will conduct a thorough investigation and develop probable cause to obtain a search warrant to open the suspected parcel. They may take a sample of the narcotics and then send the parcel with all of the documentation to your agency. Once the incoming parcel is taken into custody at your end, investigators should conduct as thorough an investigation as possible of the individuals who will be taking delivery of the parcel.

Controlled Deliveries

Once the agency has taken custody of an incoming parcel from another jurisdiction, all documentation should be reviewed including the search warrant and other pertinent information. The parcel group should conduct an investigation including drive-bys of receiver locations to see if there is anyone at the location who can be identified. Information that can be verified from vehicle tag information, residence information, and any other source of

information should be explored. Once all of the information has been developed, a controlled delivery is an investigative option.

A controlled delivery is delivery of a parcel, package, or envelope containing narcotics under controlled circumstances that has been sent either via a commercial private parcel company or the U.S. Postal system. The actual physical delivery is typically made by a police officer in an undercover capacity, or by the U.S. Postal Inspector if the parcel is U.S. Mail. Under these controlled circumstances, the objective is to have a law enforcement officer make the delivery of the parcel to the suspect, who will either sign for or take custody of the parcel. The undercover agent will attempt to solicit any statements in which the suspect may admit knowledge of the parcel delivery. The key to any parcel investigation is for law enforcement to prove that the subject had *knowledge* of the parcel's contents. This is critical to the prosecution of the suspect in a parcel investigation. It is virtually impossible to litigate a criminal case without proving knowledge of contents.

The difficulty with controlled deliveries is timeliness. There is limited investigative time if the parcel is sent overnight or express mail. Many traffickers will instruct associates not to accept parcels if they are late. This is a difficult proposition for law enforcement. An officer may attempt to deliver a suspect package but the person will not accept it, because he knows that commercial parcel companies guarantee delivery by a certain time.

Once a decision has been made to conduct a controlled delivery of a parcel, most states allow an anticipatory search warrant to be drafted. An anticipatory search warrant is prepared in anticipation of a controlled delivery of a parcel to a premises. Probable cause, which led the law enforcement agency to the discovery of the parcel, should be included and articulated in the anticipatory search warrant. All fictitious information, type of drugs, examinations, and all other pertinent information should be included in the anticipatory search warrant.

In some jurisdictions, a judge or magistrate will sign the anticipatory search warrant before the controlled delivery of a parcel. In other jurisdictions, the parcel must be delivered and be in the premises before the anticipatory search warrant is signed. In that case, the investigator will be in the presence of a judge and as soon as he is advised that the parcel is in the location, the anticipatory search warrant is signed by the judge. In some jurisdictions, with an anticipatory search warrant, once the parcel that was delivered during the controlled delivery is located, the search must be terminated. In other jurisdictions, investigators may be allowed to include other items as part of the search warrant such as documents related to the parcel activity. This must be discussed with the U.S. Attorney's office, or state or district attorney's office in the particular jurisdiction.

In addition to preparing the anticipatory search warrant, investigators may consider placing an electronic alarm device within the suspect parcel. This court-ordered tracking device emits a tone once placed inside the parcel. When the recipient opens the parcel, the device emits a tone that alerts investigators that the parcel has been opened. The placement and monitoring of this type of electronic device requires issuance of a court order. Application for a court order-authorized mobile tracking device is a separate document from the anticipatory search warrant. The mobile tracking device order should indicate that law enforcement placed the device in a suspected package parcel to track the parcel to its ultimate destination and to alert that the parcel has been opened. No monitoring of conversation is permitted under these circumstances. Typically, the initial tone of the device is a slow beep tone and once the alarm has been triggered, it emits a fast, flowing tone. The criteria for use of an electronic device are the size of the parcel. It is very difficult to place, for example, a device in an overnight envelope. The box should be large enough to house this type of device. Law enforcement agencies can purchase these electronic alarm devices from a variety of vendors. The device is the size of a credit card or smaller, and less than $\frac{1}{8}$ in thick.

In preparation for the controlled delivery, investigators should conduct pre-surveillance of the targeted location in an attempt to identify any individuals related to the case or any suspicious activity at the location. In a controlled delivery operation, law enforcement should take the same steps as for preparation of any search warrant execution. An operational briefing should be conducted; entry teams and search teams will be assigned with regard to execution of the search warrant.

When conducting a controlled delivery with a commercial private carrier, loss prevention personnel will assist in the delivery. The facility will provide the necessary equipment such as a delivery truck, delivery attire, and necessary documents to accomplish the delivery. In a controlled delivery using U.S. mail, the U.S. Postal Inspector's office will conduct the controlled delivery with the local, state, or other federal agency. The delivery will be conducted by someone wearing U.S. Postal Service attire.

During a controlled delivery, electronic surveillance should be used to secure evidence. Electronic devices such as a body bugs may be used by the investigator making the controlled delivery for the purposes of safety and to obtain any evidentiary conversation with the suspect or suspects. The use of video equipment to conduct electronic surveillance of the controlled delivery is suggested and can be used as evidence in the case. Surveillance teams should be in place for mobile surveillance in case the suspect takes custody of the parcel and departs the location once the delivery has been made. Mobile units as well as air support, if available, with either a fixed-wing plane or a helicopter, is suggested.

The decision to stop or detain the suspects is different in every case. The circumstances will dictate the approach. One of the difficulties in conducting controlled deliveries is the wait — how long it will take the individual to open the parcel after he takes delivery. This goes toward proving knowledge in a parcel case. The electronic alarm device makes this easier. When an alarm device is not feasible due to the size of the parcel, investigators may find themselves playing a guessing game as to how long to give the individual before making entry to a location. If no alarm device is available, investigators must give ample time for the parcel to be opened. Again, circumstances will dictate what occurs. If the suspect departs a location and may have the parcel or the substance contained on his person, a decision may be made to detain the individual.

Experienced traffickers may wait long periods of time, even a number of days, before opening a parcel. The agency must make a decision with respect to how long it will monitor the situation, which will depend on resources and other factors. In many parcel cases, the use of a “drop house” or business is used. A drop house is typically a location designated by the sender and receiver for a parcel to be delivered to. Lower level associates typically staff it. It may be a friend’s or relative’s home or business or an unknown residence where there is no relationship to the suspect, such as a vacant home that is for sale.

There are advantages to the use of a drop house by drug traffickers. Since it is not the suspect’s main residence, the receiver can claim that he had no knowledge of the parcel. The parcel is generally not opened at that location but is picked up by associates and taken to another location where it is opened. The difficulty in all of this is attempting to keep track of the parcel. The parcel may be delivered at the drop house, at which time the appropriate individuals are contacted, and they arrive and take custody of the parcel. If the package is large enough to be seen being removed from the location, investigators may attempt to conduct a surveillance and track the parcel with the tracking alarm device if one is placed. Once the suspected parcel is taken into another location, whether a business or residence, investigators may wait until the alarm is triggered, and then make contact with individuals at the location, securing the residence, and obtaining a search warrant. The law allows for law enforcement to be able to secure a residence and obtain a search warrant based on the circumstances described.

Once an anticipatory search warrant has been executed in a case where a parcel goes into an original location or premises, a number of investigative efforts take place. During the search of a residence, investigators should look for telephone billing information. Any telephone records showing out-of-town telephone numbers may be seized as part of the search warrant. Follow-up efforts can be made by possibly identifying the source sender. This may

assist investigators in other jurisdictions with probable cause for warrants or other investigative options. Any documents that may incriminate other individuals in the investigation, such as airline tickets or bills, hotel receipts, credit card receipts, express mail shipping receipts, bank statements, and Western Union Money transfers may assist in the investigation. The suspect's personal property should be examined, such as his wallet (for business cards), personal telephone books, (which may be evidence linking the suspect to the sending source), photographs, and other documents identifying suspects with other associates. If the suspect is wearing a digital pager, the investigators should make contact with their district attorney to see if it is permissible to examine and identify the numbers displayed and saved in the pager. There may be telephone numbers linking the receiver to the source of the narcotics. The packaging should be preserved as much as possible for obtaining latent fingerprints. In many cases, fingerprints on the packaging material have been linked to the sender.

The interview of the receiver suspect should be conducted as soon as possible. The individual may cooperate with law enforcement and enable investigators to use some innovative options to make a case with the sender. In cooperation with law enforcement, the cooperative suspect may contact his source while law enforcement conducts a controlled monitored recorded telephone conversation between the cooperative individual and the source. There may be an opportunity for a delivery of monies that are owed for the narcotics to be made by another jurisdiction, if the suspect cooperates. Attempt to identify the source during the interview of the receiver suspect. Obtain information about where the individual resides; names, telephone numbers, and other pertinent information.

Many agencies that have parcel task force groups have tried an investigative method known as a "reverse knock and talk." This is used where timeliness is a factor and the parcel could not be delivered due to a variety of circumstances, such as resource issues. The reverse knock and talk is when investigators contact the individuals at the address on the label of the parcel containing the drugs. Generally, the name will be fictitious. The agents ask if they can speak with the party and ask if he has knowledge of a parcel being delivered at his location. Many will deny any knowledge of the parcel. Others will admit to having knowledge of the contents and will provide details about the package and its delivery. The individual may cooperate and assist in follow-up operations. Nothing ventured, nothing gained is the motto here. Why not take a shot at trying to further the investigation, unless other information is developed and a long-term operation is warranted.

Follow-up efforts may include trash or garbage pulls from the suspect residence to determine what activity may be occurring. Trash pulls are

permissible from a residence or business if the trash is put out to the curb for collection. Investigators should not take trash from the residence if it is near the home such as by the garage; it must be clearly left on the curb for collection, where there is no expectation by the owner that it will not be taken. Trash should be examined for remnants or trace amounts of drugs, evidence of parcel activity such as discarded packaging from parcels received, and other evidence of narcotic activity. Investigators have found trace amounts of drugs in discarded packages. All of this evidence can be used if there is a pattern to track parcels being delivered at the location as well as build probable cause for a search warrant for the premises. These are all options that the investigator may take into consideration.

U.S. Postal Inspection Service Role

The U.S. Postal Inspection Service is the investigative arm of the U.S. Postal Service. Postal inspectors are federal law enforcement officers who enforce over 200 federal laws in investigations of crime to include controlled substances. Under U.S. Code 21, U.S. C841, 843, and 844, postal inspectors initiate investigations related to transportation and distribution of narcotics through the U.S. Mail or other postal facilities. The U.S. Postal Inspection Service cooperates with local, state, and other federal law enforcement agencies in controlled substance operations. These joint investigative efforts with local authorities are part of parcel interdiction groups around the country. The postal inspectors investigate individuals who utilize the U.S. Postal system to facilitate the transportation of narcotics. The postal inspector's office does perform the controlled deliveries of suspected parcels with the assistance of local, state, and other federal authorities. The U.S. Postal Inspector is typically the individual who makes a controlled delivery of U.S. mail. Federal search warrants are only used in searching U.S. mail. State search warrants are not valid in the searching of U.S. mail.

The U.S. Postal Inspection Service can also assist local law enforcement in identifying patterns of activity, through what is known as "mail watch." With a mail watch, investigators can identify patterns of incoming and outgoing mail by an individual. Correspondence with the suspect of incoming mail only is known as a "mail cover." Investigators can identify correspondence with the suspect from other individuals. The U.S. Postal Inspection Service can also conduct a historical search of mail being delivered to a particular location.

U.S. Customs Service

Working hand in hand with the U.S. Postal Inspection Service is the U.S. Customs Service. The U.S. Customs Service has the authority to inspect all outgoing and incoming mail entering or leaving the borders of the United States. A Customs inspector or agent can examine the parcels without a warrant. In many cases, contraband is located during inspection of inbound mail in the United States from foreign countries. Once U.S. mail has been searched and contraband is located, the U.S. Customs Service contacts the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, who takes custody of the parcel. The next contact is typically with the local authorities to initiate further investigation and possibly conduct a controlled delivery.

Freight Companies

Freight companies have become a popular transportation method for drug traffickers in conjunction with other parcel services. Freight cargo companies transport larger freight. Standard ground freight and temperature-controlled vehicles are some of the services available. Much of the coverage area is within the continental United States, Canada, and Mexico, although there can be shipments to other countries as well. Some of the concealment methods for narcotics in the utilization of freight companies are common items such as water heaters, washers, and dryers. Traffickers gut out the internal mechanisms and fill the items with substances such as cocaine and cannabis. Other items used to transport controlled substances are wooden or steel crates. The delivery process is not as rapid as the traditional commercial type services; however, trafficking organizations do use these systems.

There are a number of ways traffickers obtain the freight once it is delivered. The freight can be delivered to a particular location or to the loading dock of the freight company. The trafficker would then arrive at the freight company and pick up the package. This is known as a “dock pickup.” The receiver can pick up the items directly from the freight company.

Parcel interdiction groups should contact freight companies and make them aware that their businesses can be used as transportation systems for narcotics. Investigators can enlist their cooperation in dealing with drug trafficking activities. Freight companies should be briefed and trained about the same indicators that commercial parcel systems are trained to recognize. The freight company staff should be alerted to items used in concealing narcotics such as those previously suggested — in common appliances and other packaging. The question to ask is why would an individual pay several

hundred dollars to have a water heater, washer, or dryer delivered from a remote location when it could be purchased locally at a much lower price?

Other Common Practices

Parcel delivery systems of all types attract other criminal activity as well as narcotics. These systems can be used in a variety of criminal activities, such as the dealing and transportation of stolen property. Investigators should be aware that they may receive information concerning other activities that are occurring.

Drug trafficking organizations sometimes use multiple services including the U.S. Postal Service, Federal Express, Airborne Express, and United Parcel Service, in order to elude law enforcement, so that their parcels may not be identified. In this fashion, they do what is known as “splitting loads.” Narcotics are sent in several packages instead of one large package. The theory is that several parcels may go through the system and others may be intercepted.

Drug traffickers also send “test parcels”, which they intentionally contaminate. Investigators may see a heavy parcel in which a drug canine alerts to the odor of narcotics and, when it is opened it may contain other items, such as books, and no narcotics. This is done to see if the parcel is going to be intercepted, and the trafficker may then decide to use another method of transportation.

Commercial bus systems also provide parcel service through their bus lines. Greyhound bus lines in all parts of the country have this service. An individual can walk into any Greyhound bus terminal and send a package.

Another delivery service called Package Express is utilized by drug traffickers in many parts of the United States. It is another popular transportation method.

Common among commercial and independent parcel facilities is the sale of new boxes for shipping. Investigators should make a practice of asking staff if they have any individuals buying new boxes on a regular basis. If there is a pattern of a person buying boxes, that individual may be buying them to send drugs. This is also common at storage unit facilities, where boxes are sold for moving purposes. A person may indicate he is moving or doing other things with the boxes. Most of us do not move but a few times in our lifetimes; these people claim they move frequently. If it appears suspicious, a closer examination may be warranted. Drug traffickers go to a variety of places to buy boxes. If interdiction programs exist in a jurisdiction, that information will be revealed.

Another indicator is parcels being sent from independent facilities in source cities or states, such as California, Florida, or Texas. A drug trafficker

typically will walk into an independent store (pack-and-ship type) in a source area and mail a package to a receiver in another part of the country. The label will be the independent store's label, using their address, and the sender will use a fictitious name. This way the sender cannot be tracked because he is not using his address. An indicator that investigators look for is a person sending a parcel through an independent company.

Another common practice is sending a package to oneself. Individuals will travel to a source state or city, procure the drugs, and then send them through a parcel service to a location that is either their business or home, or a drop location such as a relative or friend's home. They can also use post office boxes, mailbox rentals at storage facilities, or independent facilities. In some cases, individuals travel to foreign countries and obtain narcotics, and send the items back using a parcel service.

Case Study

In a case in Florida, an individual traveled to Amsterdam, Holland and purchased a quantity of hashish. In Amsterdam, many drugs can be purchased legally. This particular individual, before leaving for Amsterdam from the United States, told eight of his friends to anticipate receiving a letter from Amsterdam. They were instructed not to open the letters and to provide them to him when he returned to the United States. In Amsterdam, the person purchased the hashish, placed small amounts in eight envelopes, and sent them to his friends in the United States. The U.S. Customs Service noticed that the envelopes were identical. They opened several of them and discovered the hashish. The U.S. Postal Inspector's Office was contacted, which contacted local law enforcement, and controlled deliveries were made to the eight locations. The investigation revealed that the common denominator for all eight individuals was their association with the person who traveled to Amsterdam. A criminal case was made when the subject returned from Amsterdam.

Hotels are a popular receiving point for parcel deliveries that contain narcotics. As outlined in Chapter 5, investigators should be mindful of parcels delivered to hotels and motels.

Case Study

A case in west central Florida revealed an individual using a hotel to accept delivery of a parcel from a Central American country. In this case, U.S. Customs Service Inspectors seized a package inbound from the Central American country. Examination of the interior of the box revealed a number of clothing items, including shirts and pants. The customs inspector found that cocaine had been secreted in the interior seam of the waistline area of

the pants and the seam was re sewn. In addition, several woman's hair barrettes had been taken apart and cocaine was secreted in the hair barrettes, which were then placed back into their original state. The parcel was destined for a small hotel, addressed to a subject who was staying at the hotel for a number of weeks. The person left the motel and left instructions with the owner/manager to contact him if a parcel arrived for him. The name, as it turned out, was a fictitious name. The person did leave a telephone number. The U.S. Postal Inspector's Office took custody of the parcel and contacted the local police agency to attempt a controlled delivery. The postal inspector, in an undercover capacity posing as a postman, made contact with the manager of the hotel, who indicated that he was given instructions to contact the person when the package arrived. The postal inspector directed the hotel manager to have the receiver contact the local post office, at which time the package would be held at that location.

The suspect made contact with the local post office, at which time he was asked to pick up the parcel from that location. The suspect and his girlfriend arrived at the location, picked up the box, and traveled to a nearby residence. Entry was made to the residence, which was secured, for a search warrant. It was discovered that the suspect had opened the package and had used a razor blade to open the seams on the interior waistline area of the pants as well as the hair barrettes. Much of the cocaine had been extracted from those areas and was observed on the coffee table when investigators made entry. The person was convicted in circuit court for trafficking cocaine. There were approximately 10 ounces of cocaine secreted in these items.

Many other types of containers are used to transport narcotics through various parcel systems, including Igloo coolers with foam insulation or crates, wooden or steel type, to house and secrete narcotics, from marijuana to cocaine.

Internet activity is popular for procuring narcotics such as steroids from many European countries and Mexico. Many individuals not only use the Internet for steroid procurement, but also travel to Mexico and buy steroids at local pharmacies and send the items to themselves via a parcel system instead of carrying them over the border. Many agencies have made controlled deliveries of steroids from a variety of sources, in which the person used the Internet to purchase the items. Steroids and other controlled substances are available via the Internet.

Parcels can be tracked via the Internet. Tracking by airbill number is available with the majority of the larger commercial parcel services. Individuals can log on to the web site of the parcel service and access their tracking page. Multiple tracking numbers can be loaded, so that a trafficker is able to trace his parcel's progress through the packaging system.

Conclusion

The use of parcel systems to facilitate the transportation of drugs is extremely popular worldwide. This global phenomenon has exploded in the past several years, and there is no end in sight. Parcel task force groups in police jurisdictions nationwide are busy trying to keep up with this transportation method. Trafficking organizations, gang members, and individuals alike use the parcel/package systems as part of their drug trafficking activities. Other methods are also used to complement the parcel movement. Drug trafficking organizations use not only parcel systems but other methods such as commercial bus, train, and commercial air to move their product.

Case Law

***Wisconsin v. Gordon*, 964 N.W. 2d 91 (1990) Wis. App.**

Detention of package from private dormitory for 52 hours was permissible on reasonable suspicion it contained narcotics; police acted with due diligence to transport package to closest location where drug-sniffing dog available.

***New York v. Offen*, 558, N.Y.S. 2d 415 (1990) N.Y.D.**

Few hours' delay in delivering UPS package, to submit to dog sniff and x-ray, upheld on reasonable suspicion.

***State v. Daly*, 47 CRL 1099 (1990) Kan. Ct. App.**

Suspicion apparently based on package being sealed with duct tape; no delay delivering.

***State v. Snitkin*, 681 P.2d 980 (1984) Hawaii**

Random sniffing.

***U.S. v. Fulero*, 498 F.2d 748 (1974) D.C. Cir.**

Footlocker shipped via Greyhound; prior suspicion.

***U.S. v. Dillon*, 810 F. Supp. 57 (1992) WDNY**

Search warrant for UPS parcels and residence of addressee was valid based on canine sniff, which was not a search.

***U.S. v. Pono*, 746 F. Supp. 220 (1990) D. Me**

Detaining express mail package for sniff did not delay normal delivery time for the package, so no interference with possessory interest.

***U.S. v. Van Leewen*, 397 U.S. 249, (1970) 90 S. Ct. 1029**

Detention of packages for 30 hours based on reasonable suspicion the packages contained stolen coins was proper.

***U.S. v. Aldaz*, 921 F.2d 227 (1990) 9th Cir.**

Reasonable suspicion justifies detention and rerouting postal mail from normal route to a special location for dog sniff is proper.

***U.S. v. England*, 971 F.2d 419 (1992) 9th Cir.**

Post office diversion of suspect mail for dog sniff was not a seizure (Jacobsen) because no delay in normal delivery schedule occurred.

Key Terms

- Airbill tracking
- Alarm device
- Anticipatory search warrants
- Commercial parcel companies
- Controlled deliveries
- Court-ordered tracking device
- Dock pickup
- Drop houses
- Electronic surveillance
- “Eyes and ears”
- Freight companies
- Independent parcel service
- Indicators
- Internet access
- Latent fingerprints
- Letter of commitment
- Mail cover
- Mail watch
- Over-the-counter operations
- Parcel systems
- Probable cause
- Pulls
- Random examinations
- Reverse knock and talk
- Shotgun effect
- Splitting loads
- Test parcels
- Trash
- U.S. Customs Service
- U.S. Postal Inspector’s Office
- U.S. Postal Service