



HAWAII HEALTH SYSTEMS
C O R P O R A T I O N

"Touching Lives Every Day"

COMPLIANCE ALERT 10-38

HIPAA Reminder: Please Ensure that all Correspondence with Protected Health Information is Sent in Sealed Envelopes

Recently, a possible HIPAA breach was discovered at a HHSC facility when an unsealed envelope with possible protected health information inside was given to the Compliance Officer. An investigation is underway by the Compliance Department. The material inside was easily accessed by anybody touching the envelope.

Regardless of the outcome of this particular episode, we need to ensure that all correspondence sent within a facility or mailed outside the facility is sealed properly. Staff should not necessarily count on the mail room or delivery personnel to seal envelopes, interoffice packets, etc. If not sealed properly (as was the case here), material can drop out of the envelope, be lost, or be opened and returned by people who have no need or right to access the information. If machines are used to seal envelopes, regular checks should be made to test the sealings—especially during mailings of bills, medical reports, etc. that contain sensitive and/or protected health information.

Recommendations:

- Distribute this *Compliance Alert* to appropriate facility personnel.
- Inspect any machines or processes that automatically seal envelopes.
- Train and educate staff on the importance of properly sealing all correspondence containing protected health information.
 1. For USPS: moisture seal envelopes, press firmly for tacky envelopes, add scotch tape if any doubt.
 2. For Intradepartmental: use staple or tape for reusable envelope, or use above if using a new envelope.

Please contact your Regional Compliance Officer or the Chief Compliance and Privacy Officer if you have any questions or comments.

