

Beat: News

Police question New York man over ;suspicious; Google searches

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USPA News - Police in New York have questioned a former employee of a computer company after his workplace computer revealed 'suspicious' Google searches for "pressure cooker bombs" and "backpacks," officials confirmed Thursday after a blog post caused public uproar. The questioning began at around 9 a.m. local time on Wednesday at a home in Suffolk County, which is the easternmost county in the state and part of the New York metropolitan area.

The wife of the former computer company employee, who identified herself as Michele Catalano, described the events in a blog post on Thursday. "My husband, who happened to be home yesterday, was sitting in the living room with our two dogs when he heard a couple of cars pull up outside," she wrote. "He looked out the window and saw three black SUVs in front of our house; two at the curb in front and one pulled up behind my husband's Jeep in the driveway, as if to block him from leaving." Catalano added: "Six gentleman in casual clothes emerged from the vehicles and spread out as they walked toward the house, two toward the backyard on one side, two on the other side, two toward the front door. [My husband] walked outside and the men greeted him by flashing badges. He could see they all had guns holstered in their waistbands." The blog post caused uproar on the Internet on Thursday after Catalano said the officers were interested in recent Google searches about pressure cooker bombs and backpacks, which were both used in the April bombings at the Boston Marathon. The bombings killed three spectators and injured 264 others. In a statement released late on Thursday, the Suffolk County Police Department confirmed its Criminal Intelligence Detectives had received a tip from a Bay Shore-based computer company regarding 'suspicious' computer searches that were conducted by an employee who had recently left the company. "The former employee's computer searches took place on this employee's workplace computer. On that computer, the employee searched the terms "pressure cooker bombs" and "backpacks," the statement said. "After interviewing the company representatives, Suffolk County Police Detectives visited the subject's home to ask about the suspicious internet searches." Catalano wrote in her blog post that the officers at the house were from the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force, but agency spokeswoman Kelly J. Langmesser denied this. "The FBI, nor the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force, was involved in the action mentioned in Ms. Catalano's blog post," she said. The blogger, who said the officers questioned her husband for about 45 minutes and received permission to walk through the house, later apologized for the inaccurate details in her post. "I did not lie or make it up. I wrote the piece with the information that was given," she said in an update. "What was withheld from us obviously could not be a part of a story I wrote based on what happened yesterday." In her original blog post, Catalano suggested the questioning was the result of the U.S. government's secret surveillance programs, which have received international attention in recent weeks following unauthorized disclosures by National Security Agency (NSA) whistleblower Edward Snowden. "This is where we are at. Where you have no expectation of privacy. Where trying to learn how to cook some lentils could possibly land you on a watch list," Catalano wrote. "Where you have to watch every little thing you do because someone else is watching every little thing you do. All I know is if I'm going to buy a pressure cooker in the near future, I'm not doing it online." But the statement from the Suffolk County Police Department indicated that the questioning was not the result of any sort of surveillance, but rather the result of a tip from the man's former employer. Officials said Criminal Intelligence Detectives decided the incident was determined to be "non-criminal in nature" and no further action will be taken.

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