

# Google searches bring visit by joint terrorism task force in Long Island

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3 August 2013

On Wednesday, Suffolk County police, working with a joint terrorism task force, showed up at a suburban home in New York State looking for terrorist connections. The visit was prompted by Internet searches conducted by members of the family using terms that included “backpacks” and “pressure cookers.”

Michele Catalano, who was at work and whose husband notified her by telephone of the visit by six plainclothes police officers, described the events in a blog post the following day. She speculated that the visit was provoked by various Google searches in recent weeks, she looking for a new pressure cooker, her husband for a backpack, and her son for background information on the April 15 Boston Marathon bombings.

Two pressure cooker bombs exploded near the finish line of the race, killing three people and wounding 264 others. The bombs were allegedly left by the perpetrators in backpacks they had been carrying.

The visit by the police, coming in the midst of almost daily revelations of the immense scope of illegal government spying, led Catalano to conclude that the National Security Agency (NSA) and other government agencies were poised to act on detailed knowledge of anyone’s computer searches. She described the events on her blog post:

“At about 9:00 am, 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. He looked out the window and saw three black SUVs in front of our house... Six gentlemen 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...

“They asked if they could search the house, though it turned out to be just a cursory search... they were peppering my husband with questions. Where is he from? Where are his parents from? They asked about me, where was I, where do I work, where do my parents live. *Do you have any bombs*, they asked? Do you own a pressure cooker? My husband said no, but we have a rice cooker. Can you make a bomb with that? My husband said no, my wife uses it to make quinoa. What the hell is quinoa, they asked...

“*Have you ever looked up how to make a pressure cooker bomb*? My husband, ever the oppositional kind, asked them if they themselves weren’t curious as to how a pressure cooker bomb works, if they ever looked it up. Two of them admitted they did...”

Catalano’s blog post and numerous other reports were immediately circulated on the Internet, provoking outrage. The Suffolk County Police Department issued a statement on Thursday evening seeking to explain the incident.

According to the *Atlantic Wire* web site, the police declared that their chilling encounter with the Catalano family was not the product of direct surveillance of home Google searches, but rather was triggered by a tip from a computer company in nearby Bay Shore that had until recently employed Catalano’s husband. Searches at work that included the terms “pressure cooker bombs” and “backpacks” led the company to alert the police.

“After interviewing the company representatives,” the police statement claimed, “Suffolk County police detectives visited the subject’s home to ask about the suspicious Internet searches. The incident was investigated by Suffolk County Police Department’s criminal intelligence detectives and was determined to be non-criminal in nature.”

The detectives explained that they made about 100 such visits a week. As the *Atlantic Wire* report put it, “One hundred times a week, groups of six armed men drive to houses in three black SUVs, conducting consented-if-casual searches of the property, perhaps in part because of things people look up online.”

The Suffolk County police statement may have been designed to reassure the population that Google searches and computer use were not being examined, but the facts of this story only underscore the atmosphere of fear and hysteria that is being whipped up to justify the attacks on privacy and all democratic rights.

In the past few days alone, the government Xkeyscore program has been revealed as the “widest-reaching” of the NSA’s systems of warrantless surveillance. At the same time, a US appeals court has given its approval to the warrantless collection of cell phone data. And bellicose comments have come from the White House and official Washington in the wake of the granting of temporary asylum to Edward Snowden in Russia, implicitly threatening the freedom and security of the whistle-blower whose courageous revelations brought attention to these attacks on democratic rights.

The Boston marathon bombing, despite the cloud of unanswered questions surrounding it, is being used to target millions of people whose curiosity has been aroused by the hysterical coverage in the media to begin with, and whose innocent computer use is then deemed “suspicious” by police working with the FBI and “terrorism task forces.” This vicious cycle is then used to further escalate the attacks on privacy rights and to seek to inure the population to police state measures.



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