A Review of Campus Bomb Threats in the United States (2013)

By Brian Van Brunt, Ed.D. and Kelly Almously, M.Ed.

Abstract
During the past academic year, US colleges and universities have seen an increase in bomb threats over the Internet, through phone calls and anonymous reports. This article summarizes the bomb threats that occurred during the 2013 academic year* (January 1-October 31). The authors summarize the data by location, month, how the threat was made, emergency notification activation, campus evacuation, and if charges were filed.

Data Collection
Kelly Almously conducted a detailed Internet search to locate stories and reports related to campus bomb threats. She utilized the search engines Bing, Yahoo and Google with the terms “campus bomb threat 2013,” “college bomb threat 2013,” and “university bomb threat 2013” and some other variations of these themes. She also used Twitter references from students and verified them through news reports (these had not come up in the initial search). Data collected included bomb threats reported anonymously as well as suspicious devices found (a more limited data set).

Overview of Data
100 unique events were collected and analyzed as part of this study. 7% of the threats were suspected explosive devices, 93% were bomb threats.

Nature of Threat
79% of threats were made anonymously (79/100). 22% (22/100) of the reports were made by email or written communication. 7% (7/100) were made verbally or in person. 8% (8/100)
involved witnesses calling or texting the police. 15% of reports (15/100) were made through writing on the Internet, email or Facebook.

**Time and Geographic Location**

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**2013 January-October Bomb Threats by State**

[Map showing the distribution of bomb threats by state]
**Emergency Alert and Evacuation**

Out of 100 threats, Emergency Alerts were issued in 47% (47/100) of the events. When an emergency alert was issued, 85% this resulted in a campus evacuation. Out of the 100 threats, 40% of these resulted in an evacuation of the campus. Out of the 100 threats, campus evacuations occurred 82% of the time.

**Person Identified and/or Charges Filed**

In 76% of the cases, the person making the bomb threat was not identified. Out of the 100 threats, charges were filed 22% of the time. There were several cases when the person(s) were identified (especially those threats via email), but not for many months later (ie: if the FBI got involved, time it takes to track down IP addresses, etc.).

**Motivation for Threat**

In 66% of the cases, there is pending or incomplete information related to the motivation of the person making the threat. The following four clusters identify some of the reasons the person made the threat when they could be identified.

**Mad, upset or disgruntled student**

Examples include: a student coming into the library and saying “you are gonna die” and then emptying backpack; threats made to professors directly over email; a Greek student who did not receive bid for rush then made a bomb threat.

**Student nervous about upcoming events**

Examples include: a graduate student worried about teaching a class, other students worried about a test; threats made during the first day of fall semester.

**Suicidal Students**

Students experiencing suicidal thoughts or ideations and call in bomb threat to the school.
Miscellaneous
The data shows several students writing messages on bathroom walls about explosives. It also shows students creating “soda-pop” bombs that then explode around campus, homeless non-students and local court trial verdict resulted in bomb threat.

Conclusion
This article was created to establish a baseline exploration of college and university bomb threats in the United States. Further research should focus on developing a more accurate methodology to scan for and obtain data related to threats as they occur. A difficult part of this study was the archival nature of going back through news stories and social media to obtain the data related to threats. Specific excel data used to create this study can be requested by emailing brian@ncherm.org.