

# **FBI BOMB CONCLUSIONS UNDER FIRE INSPECTOR GENERAL REPORT QUESTIONS THEORY THAT FERTILIZER, FUEL OIL BOMB BROUGHT BUILDING DOWN**

Rocky Mountain News (Denver, CO)  
March 23, 1997 | Kilzer, Lou

What blew up in Oklahoma City at 9:02 a.m. April 19, 1995?

The FBI said it was a simple device made of fertilizer and diesel oil, something that could be built by unsophisticated terrorists for \$500 to \$1,000.

The problem: Agents had no scientific evidence for their theory.

As first disclosed in the Rocky Mountain News March 2, a committee of experts working for the inspector general in the Justice Department concluded that the FBI had based its conclusion about the kind of bomb that was used on the ingredients they believed defendants Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols had purchased.

In fact, the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building gave agents little evidence for their conclusions. Only a microscopic sample of the fertilizer, ammonium nitrate, was found. No other explosives were detected.

Now the draft of an inspector general's report, made public Friday by the Los Angeles Times, says the damage to the government's case goes even further.

The FBI downplayed evidence suggesting that a far more powerful bomb was used, the report said.

The report concluded that the FBI hasn't determined how such a super bomb could have been triggered. The report also said that contamination in the FBI crime lab could account for explosives residue found on McVeigh's ear plugs, clothing and knife after his arrest.

With the start of McVeigh's trial in Denver just eight days away, the government's forensic evidence for one of the most important prosecutions in modern American history is on the ropes.

Prosecutors have maintained that the defense has "mischaracterized" the importance of forensic evidence in the case. They say they have a powerful circumstantial case even without it.

Neither the defense nor the prosecution is commenting on the inspector general's report, mindful of a renewed gag order in the case from U.S. District Judge Richard Matsch.

The inspector general's report, still subject to revision by senior Justice Department officials, is not expected until mid-April.

But armed with the draft report's conclusions, the defense can now say the bomb was much more powerful than the government let on - one that could never have been assembled by undistinguished ex-Army drifters such as McVeigh and Nichols.

The report also could let the defense challenge the fact of explosives residue being found on McVeigh - residue once thought to link him firmly to the crime.

The inspector general's investigation was prompted by lab specialist Frederic Whitehurst, once one of the FBI's top bomb experts. He said lab scientists were guilty of sloppy procedures and a tendency to slant results.

The report supported many of Whitehurst's allegations. But it also concluded that many of the complaints from Whitehurst lack merit. The FBI has suspended him from the lab.

Heavy criticism in the report was directed at FBI supervisor David Williams, whose analyses "are scientifically unsound, are not explained . . . and are biased in favor of the prosecution," the draft report said, according to the Los Angeles Times.

The report charged that Williams' analysis of the bomb's trigger was based on items found in Nichols' house. None of the items was found at the scene.

In concluding that the Oklahoma bomb was made from ammonium nitrate and fuel oil, the FBI downplayed evidence that McVeigh may have been shopping for nitromethane and anhydrous hydrazine, which could create the most powerful sub-nuclear bomb possible.

Two nitromethane suppliers called the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms months before the Oklahoma bombing to report that a man prosecutors now believe was McVeigh was trying to buy large quantities of the substances.

Their stories were ignored until after the blast.