

FBI INVESTIGATES POSSIBLE MCVEIGH LINK TO FUEL BUY

Rocky Mountain News

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FBI agents descended on a Texas auto racing track last month looking for evidence that Timothy McVeigh bought a large quantity of powerful racing fuel before the Oklahoma City bombing, ABC reported Thursday night.

Employees of VP Racing Fuels told the FBI that a man resembling McVeigh in 1994 paid \$2,700 cash in Texas for nitromethane, ABC said.

The chemical is an accelerant the government now believes may have been used to detonate the bomb that killed 168 people.

Previously, the government has maintained that the bomb was made of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil. Some explosives experts questioned whether such a bomb could have caused the extensive damage seen in Oklahoma.

The Rocky Mountain News reported Feb. 5 that a bomb mixed with nitromethane instead of fuel oil would be much more powerful.

The News reported that an official of VP Racing Fuels warned federal agents in October 1994 that a man resembling McVeigh was trying to buy nitromethane or anhydrous hydrazine - highly explosive fuels for dragsters.

The disclosure that the government is seeking additional evidence against McVeigh comes as jury selection in his trial in Denver nears the end of its second week.

Glynn Tipton, the VP Racing official, is expected to testify in Denver that a man resembling McVeigh approached him at a dragstrip in Topeka, Kan., to inquire about purchasing racing fuel.

After becoming suspicious that the man's real intent was to make a bomb, Tipton called the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to report the incident.

A March 11 Playboy magazine article, purportedly based on documents from McVeigh's defense team, said that McVeigh bought three drums of nitromethane at a Texas race track for \$2,700.

The FBI's visit to the Texas racetrack comes as the government seeks to solidify its case.

The prosecution has been battered in recent months by problems with the reliability of key witnesses. For example, the government plans to call no witnesses placing McVeigh in Oklahoma City the day of the bombing.

Nor will it call the victim of an Arkansas armed robbery the prosecution alleges helped finance the bombing conspiracy.

And witnesses identifying McVeigh as the man who rented the truck used in the bombing have displayed foggy memories in certain details.

The Associated Press reported Thursday that the government has listed 327 witnesses it may call. Many are technical experts who will explain telephone credit call records the government says tie McVeigh and co-defendant Terry Nichols to the bombing.

Also on the list is Michael Fortier, an ex-Army friend who will be the star witness against McVeigh. Fortier told authorities the two men cased the Alfred P. Murrah Building in Oklahoma four months before the bombing.

As expected, McVeigh's younger sister Jennifer is on the list.

McVeigh told his sister the government started the fire that killed 80 members of the Branch Davidian sect in Waco, Texas, in 1993.

The prosecution won't comment on its witnesses.

INFOBOX

TRIAL AT A GLANCE: Day 9

Thursday's summary

So far, 56 prospective jurors have been interviewed. Twelve jurors and six alternates will be chosen.

Today's schedule

Interviewing of potential jurors from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Quote of the day

``I wonder why the government or federal agents weren't put on trial for murdering the children and people inside."

- Prospective juror on the government's handling of its confrontation with Branch Davidian sect members near Waco, Texas, in 1993.