

# New lead probed in Oklahoma City bombing



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**SPOKANE --** FBI officials are investigating a tip from here that suggests a white separatist awaiting trial for a string of crimes in Ohio and Arkansas may have been involved in the Oklahoma City bombing.

Agents are trying to determine the credibility of the tip from a former Spokane motel manager, who says Chevie Kehoe showed up at the business about 45 minutes before the 1995 Oklahoma blast and wanted to watch CNN, spokesman Ray Lauer said Friday from the FBI's regional office in Seattle.

"If he did know about it or participated in the gathering of materials or the planning of that event, that makes him a co- conspirator," Lauer said of Kehoe, a resident of Colville, about 60 miles north of Spokane.

"That certainly would be our main point of interest in investigating this."

The manager also told authorities that Kehoe arranged to have a man stay at The Shadows Motel & RV Park a few months before the Oklahoma City bombing -- a man who closely resembled Timothy McVeigh, who has been convicted in the blast.

"It's a little premature to judge the credibility of these stories," Lauer said. "We're certainly following through on it to try and learn anything we can that could corroborate his information."

FBI agents this week interviewed the man, whom Lauer wouldn't identify, and were trying to contact others who may be able to confirm the claims, the spokesman said.

Findings will be presented to the FBI task force investigating the Oklahoma City case, Lauer said.

Dan Vogel, an FBI spokesman in Oklahoma City, declined to comment Friday on

any links Kehoe may have to the case.

Jerry McHenry, a court-appointed lawyer representing Kehoe in the Ohio trial, said Friday his client had never told him of any association with McVeigh.

"The first I heard of this was this morning," McHenry said in Columbus.

Federal investigators have acknowledged they had identified suspects in the case other than McVeigh and co-defendant Terry Nichols, though they so far are the only ones charged.

No other suspects have been publicly identified, and the investigation is continuing.

A grand jury in Oklahoma is looking into allegations of a government cover-up and a larger conspiracy in the bombing, which killed 168 people. The FBI and Justice Department have dismissed those allegations, and Attorney General Janet Reno said last week she was satisfied that "we have identified the people responsible."

McVeigh was sentenced to die after he was convicted of murder and conspiracy in the bombing. Nichols was convicted of conspiracy and involuntary manslaughter in December. Jurors deadlocked in the penalty phase of his trial earlier this month, leaving the judge to determine his sentence.

In a story published Friday by The Spokesman-Review newspaper, the former motel manager was quoted as saying that Kehoe showed up at the motel the morning of April 19, 1995, and became ecstatic when a news bulletin reported the Oklahoma City blast.

Kehoe said "it was about time," according to the former manager, who spoke with the newspaper on condition of anonymity.

"Days before that, he had mentioned to me that there's going to be something happening on the 19th and it's going to wake people up," he said.

The manager also said that sometime in late 1994 or early 1995, Kehoe approached the man and asked if he could provide a free motel room to a friend.

There were vacancies that night, the former manager said, so he provided the room and didn't ask the man to sign the motel registry.

"I was introduced to a gentleman named Tim, and I now believe he was Timothy McVeigh," the manager said, describing the man as tall and slender with a military-style haircut.

"I'm 75 percent certain it was him, McVeigh, but I could be wrong."

Federal agents first interviewed the manager in October 1996 when they learned stolen firearms and survivalist supplies had been stored at the motel.

In that interview, the manager did not mention having seen a man resembling McVeigh, Lauer said. He also did not mention seeing Kehoe the morning of the bombing.

There are some missing days in the timeline developed by the FBI for McVeigh's whereabouts in the months before the bombing, Lauer said.

The manager's claim is the first indication the FBI has received that McVeigh may have been in the Spokane area during that period, Lauer said.

Two employees contacted at the motel Friday said they did not know the former manager interviewed by the FBI and had never heard anything about McVeigh staying there.

"This is the first I've heard of it," said Therese Winkler, who has managed the business for about six months.

The former motel manager is a key prosecution witness against Kehoe, 24, and two other men indicted in Little Rock, Ark., last month on racketeering charges. They are accused of plotting a revolt against the U.S. government and create the Aryan Peoples Republic, where citizenship would be limited to certain white people.

Kehoe and one of his co-defendants also are charged with murder in the 1996 deaths of Arkansas gun dealer William Mueller, his wife and 8-year-old stepdaughter.

Kehoe faces trial in Ohio on charges filed in a 1997 shootout with police officers.

Kehoe's younger brother Cheyne Kehoe, also from Colville, was convicted this week of attempted murder, assault and carrying a concealed weapon in the videotaped shootout with two Wilmington, Ohio, police officers. He has not yet been sentenced.