

# Former Northeastern University worker charged with faking explosion

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The Boston police bomb squad and other law enforcement officers respond to a call about an explosion in Holmes Hall at Northeastern University on Sept. 13. (Nicholas Pfosi/Reuters)

A former Northeastern University administrator who authorities say called police to report an exploding package at an on-campus lab last month has been charged with fabricating the story and intentionally sharing false and misleading information with federal law enforcement about the incident.

Jason Duhaime, the university’s former new technology manager and Immersive Media Lab director, was arrested Tuesday in Texas, U.S. Attorney for the District of Massachusetts Rachael S. Rollins said at a news conference. Rollins added that she could not comment on a motive because the case is ongoing.

Duhaime, 45, was charged with one count of intentionally conveying misleading information related to an explosive device and one count of making false statements to a federal law enforcement agency.

“This alleged conduct is disturbing to say the least,” Rollins said. “Mr. Duhaime’s 911 call on Sept. 13 generated an enormous law enforcement response that resulted in the evacuation of a large portion of the Northeastern campus and the understandable panic among many Northeastern students, faculty and staff.”

After an unrelated incident, federal authorities last month charged a woman who allegedly called Boston Children’s Hospital to report a false bomb threat.

According to federal authorities, Duhaime called emergency responders about 7 p.m. on Sept. 13 to report an explosion. That evening, authorities said, Duhaime told the 911 operator that he was injured by sharp objects that came out of a hard plastic Pelican case that contained a “violent note.”

As part of the investigation, Duhaime told authorities — including at least one federal agent — that earlier that day he and some students had collected several packages from the mail area and brought them to a closet in the lab, Rollins said. He told investigators that when he opened one of the cases, “very sharp” objects flew out and traveled under his shirt, injuring his arms, Rollins said. Duhaime also alleged that one of the packages contained a letter threatening the lab.

Duhaime also reported that a second suspicious container was inside the lab, authorities said. It was later deemed safe when inspected by the bomb squad.

When investigators arrived at the scene, federal authorities said, they found the Pelican case empty and undamaged. There was also no letter inside the case and no indication that it had been exposed to an explosive or forceful discharge “of any type or magnitude.” The case “appeared normal,” Rollins said at Tuesday’s news conference. The lab’s closet also appeared normal and no debris was found, federal authorities said. Duhaime was taken to the hospital, where he was treated for a minor hand injury, authorities told *The Washington Post* at the time.

Federal authorities began looking into whether the incident had been staged because Duhaime’s injuries were not consistent with those from a blast from a pressurized canister, a law enforcement official told *The Post* at the time.

In follow-up interviews with authorities, Duhaime repeated the same statements to police, adding that he did not stage the incident, Rollins said. A forensic analysis of a work computer belonging to Duhaime that was seized by investigators showed a “word-for-word letter” stored in the backup folder that was created at 2:57 p.m. that same day — four hours before the reported explosion, Rollins said. It also had a last printed date of Sept. 13 at 4:02 p.m., court records state.

A spokesperson with Northeastern University confirmed in an email to *The Post* that Duhaime is no longer employed by the university.

“Knowing what we know now about this incident, we would like to make it clear that there was never any danger to the Northeastern community. As always, the safety of our students, faculty, and staff is our highest priority,” a university spokesperson said in an email.

Duhaime, who resides in San Antonio, is scheduled to appear in front of a federal judge in Boston at a later date. Court records do not list an attorney.

*Derek Hawkins, Jacob Bogage and Gina Harkins contributed to this report.*

By Andrea Salcedo

Andrea Salcedo is a general assignment reporter for The Washington Post. She joined The Post in 2020 as an overnight reporter on the Morning Mix team. Previously, she covered breaking news and features for the New York Times metro desk. Twitter

# Appendix: How tabloid news covered the hoax bombing at the time

Source: Daily Mail

Northeastern University Police Department said Holmes Hall was secured three hours after the explosion

- The package that exploded at Northeastern University was in a 'Pelican case' which contained a bizarre 'manifesto' railing against the Metaverse and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg
- Northeastern University said the package was delivered to Holmes Hall at about 7pm Tuesday night and detonated after being opened by a staff member shortly after
- The 45-year-old male sustained minor injuries to his hand and was taken to the hospital
- Boston Bomb Squad, Boston Police, Boston fire and Boston Emergency Medical Services responded to the Leon Street incident
- Terrorism has not been ruled out by authorities, as investigations into the matter continue

A package that exploded at Northeastern University, sending a staffer, 45, to hospital with minor injuries to his hand was reportedly in a hard-sided Pelican case and contained a bizarre 'manifesto' railing against the Metaverse and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg.

Northeastern University said the package, which exploded at 7.18 pm on Tuesday night, according to police, had been delivered to campus and detonated after being opened by the male staffer.

The package was delivered at about 7pm Tuesday night to Holmes Hall on Leon Street, and was detonated shortly after, authorities told NBC Boston.

Northeastern University Police Department tweeted that the building was secured three hours after the incident took place, just before 10pm.

Holmes Hall houses the Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies program, the journalism department and the campus Virtual Reality club and immersive media (VR) labs.

An anonymous student who is a member of the university's virtual reality club told DailyMail.com that he was disturbed by the incident - though he is unaware of any specific plot to target the organization.

He also said that the person who planted the bomb may simply have been 'hurt by an interaction they had' in the immersive digital space.

'I think it's possible that, given the loss of in-person communication during quarantine, some people (in the general public, not Northeastern students in particular) may have begun relying on virtual reality for social interaction,' they told DailyMail.com.

'We don't know what psychological effects this has yet, it's a very new space.'

'It's possible that someone was hurt by an interaction they had in VR and wanted to lash out. But that's just a guess - it seems odd to target Northeastern in particular.'

Holmes Hall houses the Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies program, the journalism department and the campus Virtual Reality club, according to twitter users-Theories that the explosion may have been targeted toward Northeastern University Virtual Reality emerged on social media just hours after the incident While the theory remains unfounded, a former member of the group said 'VR and Zuckerberg' could be at the root of the attack because of a newly founded reliance on virtual platforms during the pandemic Northeastern University said the package, which exploded at 7.18 pm on Tuesday night, had been delivered to campus and detonated after being opened by a staff member The package was delivered at about 7pm Tuesday night to the Leon Street building Holmes Hall was evacuated and Northeastern University Police Department tweeted that the area was secure three hours after the incident took place A package that exploded at Northeastern University, sending a male staffer, 45, to hospital was reportedly in a 'Pelican case' and contained a bizarre 'manifesto' A Pelican case is a hard often waterproof black case with a soft inner lining typically used to transport delicate items

Security expert Todd McGhee, a former Massachusetts State Police trooper, told NBC10 Boston that he expects that investigators will be able to learn information from the device despite the blast.

'Even in an explosion, the components of the device do not necessarily disintegrate,' McGhee told NBC10 Boston.

'So there will be tangible evidence that will be collected and then, in a sense, re-assembled to a point to be able to understand all of the components that were utilized.'

Boston police also responded to a report of another suspicious package on Huntington Avenue, in the area of the Museum of Fine Arts. Police later said that was determined to be unfounded.

Cambridge police were also called to investigate a suspicious package in the 1100 block of Cambridge Street Tuesday night, but said it was 'an empty, abandoned suitcase'.

The area has been at the center of bomb threats before with the Boston Children's hospital, a five minute drive from Holmes Hall, receiving a bomb threat just two weeks ago.

The threat came after weeks of harassment from rightwing campaigns that have targeted the children's hospital for working with transgender youth.

The Boston Police Department's bomb squad say a search revealed a second similar package that was ultimately rendered safe.

The Boston Bomb Squad, Boston Police, Boston fire and Boston Emergency Medical Services (EMS) responded to the Leon Street incident, shortly after the package detonated, at about 7.20pm.

In a press conference to media Boston Mayor Michelle Wu said she is taking the incident 'very seriously' - but made no mention of any manifesto, which was first reported by WBZ-TV News.

Northeastern University said a package, which exploded at 7.18pm Tuesday night, had been delivered to campus and detonated when opened by a male staff member aged 45. Terrorism cannot be ruled out by authorities after a package exploded at the Boston University, leaving one person injured and taken to hospital. Northeastern University Police Department tweeted that Holmes Hall was secure three hours after the incident took place, earlier asking people to avoid the area. Harvard University tweeted they are working with authorities to keep their campus safe. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology tweeted for people to report any suspicious activity.

### **What is the 'Metaverse'?**

Led by the Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, the 'Metaverse' is a set of virtual spaces where you can game, work and communicate with other people who aren't in the same physical space as you.

Users' avatars are able to explore the online world and meet, interact and visit a fast-growing network of virtual locations such as cities, country scenes or cafes.

Landowners can also use their virtual spaces to design experiences for others to enjoy.

Zuckerberg believes the virtual world is the future and launched the Oculus Quest headset, now called the Meta Quest.

Facebook explained: 'You'll be able to hang out with friends, work, play, learn, shop, create and more.

'It's not necessarily about spending more time online — it's about making the time you do spend online more meaningful.'

While Facebook is leading the charge with the metaverse, it explained that it isn't a single product one company can build alone.

'Just like the internet, the metaverse exists whether Facebook is there or not,' it added.

'And it won't be built overnight. Many of these products will only be fully realized in the next 10-15 years.'



'This city is home to everyone's young people, from our littlest learners up to our college students and university staff,' said Mayor Wu.

'So we want to make sure we emphasize that this is of the utmost priority, the safety and well-being of all of our young people here.'

Holmes Hall was evacuated and a notification was sent to the Boston campus at 7.55pm urging people to avoid the area.

Shortly after 8.30 pm, the university notified Northeastern students that evening classes at the Behrakis Health Sciences Center, Shillman Hall, Ryder Hall, Kariotis Hall, Dockser Hall and West Village F are canceled due to the ongoing investigation.

Other universities in the area including The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Harvard also voiced concern.

MIT tweeted: 'MIT Alert: Explosion at Northeastern U. MIT Police are urging all MIT community to be cautious. Please report any suspicious packages.'

Jacob Isaacs (pictured) who was in class in Holmes Hall when it was evacuated says there had been some confusion about what was transpiring to prompt the evacuation. Isaacs added that they did not hear anything that sounded like an explosion before they saw first responders arrive. There are no clear leads into the mystery explosion which injured a 45-year-old Northeastern staffer.

Harvard University tweeted: 'Harvard Alert: HUPD is aware of reports of a detonation of a suspicious package at Northeastern.'

'We are working with law enforcement and increasing patrols on Harvard campuses.'

'Out of abundance of caution we urge community members to report anything suspicious to 617-495-1212.'

A 7News reporter speaking to authorities on the ground said the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) are currently coordinating with Boston Police and Terrorism had not been ruled out.

'FBI currently coordinating with Boston Police... Sources say too early to say whether this is related to terrorism or not,' the tweet read.

Boston Police told NBC Boston that the explosion took place on campus at Holmes Hall on Leon Street and the building was evacuated.

The Boston Bomb Squad, Boston Police, Boston fire and Boston EMS responded to the Leon Street incident and the FBI is also involved. Boston Emergency Medical Services tweeted reports of the explosion and said at least one person had been taken to hospital earlier in the night.

Jacob Isaacs who was in class in Holmes Hall during its evacuation told 7News there was some confusion about what had happened when the incident took place.

'We were in class and then we saw two policemen walk through the building and then as soon as we look out the window, we see a fire truck with the lights on blazing,' said Issacs.

'Our teacher is like 'I gotta see what's going on,' and he sees that the fire truck is going and there's a police car outside and as that happened, instantly the fire alarm starts going off.'

Isaacs added that they did not hear anything that sounded like an explosion before they saw first responders arrive.

Investigations into the incident continues with Northeastern University Police Department asking people to 'avoid the area.'

It is still unclear where the package came from as investigations into the matter continue.

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<[washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/10/04/northeastern-jason-duhaime-explosion-arrest](https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/10/04/northeastern-jason-duhaime-explosion-arrest/)>

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