Unabomber copycat bomb injures Mexican scientists

Essay in Nature urges colleagues to ensure their own security while the Chronicle takes a closer look at the group behind the attacks.

Steven T. Corneliussen

25 August 2011

In this week's *Nature,* Gerardo Herrera Corral—a physicist who coordinates Mexico's contributions to research at the Large Hadron Collider—opens his essay "Stand up against the anti-technology terrorists" by letting facts speak:

> My elder brother, Armando Herrera Corral, was this month sent a tube of dynamite by terrorists who oppose his scientific research. The home-made bomb, which was in a shoe-box-sized package labelled as an award for his personal attention, exploded when he pulled at the adhesive tape wrapped around it. My brother, director of the technology park at the Monterrey Institute of Technology in Mexico, was standing at the time, and suffered burns to his legs and a perforated eardrum. More severely injured by the blast was his friend and colleague Alejandro Aceves López, whom my brother had gone to see in his office to share a cup of coffee and open the award. Aceves López was sitting down when my brother opened the package; he took the brunt of the explosion in his chest, and shrapnel pierced one of his lungs.

The terrorist group behind the attacks in Mexico reportedly has declared,"Wounding or killing teachers and students does not matter to us.' In particular they have expressed hostility towards nanotechnology and computer scientists.

Corral advises:

> The scientific community must be made aware of such organizations, and of their capacity for destruction. Nanotechnology-research institutes and departments, companies and professional associations must beef up their security procedures, particularly on how they receive and accept parcels and letters.

As of early Thursday, 25 August, national newspapers do not appear to have covered the news of a Unabomber-like mail attack on Mexican scientists. But the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reports from Mexico City that a "package bomb that injured two professors at a university here this month is the latest in a string of attacks by a new terror group inspired by the Unabomber."

The lengthy article summarizes the Unabomber Theodore Kaczynski's bloody crime career—he killed three and injured many between 1978 and 1995—and the blast incident described in the *Nature* essay, and the campus security measures that are being instituted. It surveys opposition to, and fear about, nanotechnology. "Though most nanotechnology researchers in the United States are not as nervous as their Mexican colleagues," the article observes, "some are watching the situation—and their mailboxes—closely." It continues:

> 'We've warned our faculty and staff and students to be wary of packages, but we're not too concerned at this moment,' says Wade Adams, director

> of Rice University's Richard E. Smalley Institute for Nanoscale Science and Technology.
>
> Some US nanotechnology researchers have not yet heard of the bombings, though, or say they feel that risks to their own labs are minuscule.
>
> Among the latter is Ian T. Ferguson, chairman of the department of electrical and computer engineering at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, who works on nanotech projects. 'Driving on the road is problematic,' he says, putting the risk in perspective. 'Today I was driving behind a truck and its tire blew out,' which almost caused a crash. 'Do I stop driving? No way.'
>
> Jack Levin, a professor of sociology and criminology at Northeastern University, says he is not surprised to see others follow the Unabomber's pattern of mail bombings followed by antitechnology screeds. 'I don't think we should be surprised that killers are inspired by other killers,' he says. For such criminals, the main goal of producing manifestos is to justify their violent actions and portray themselves as heroes rather than villains, he argues. 'The terrorists are motivated as much from personal pathology as they are from politics or science or antiscience.'

The article also presents conjectures about "whether the bombs in Mexico are the work of a group or the actions of a lone attacker presenting himself as a group in his writings," about whether the criminal or criminals have academic affiliations, and about the grim irony that anti-technology terrorists would use the internet and other technology in committing their crimes.

"For now," the article says in closing, "the bomber or bombers who struck Mexican campuses remain at large, acting, as they put it, 'without compassion and without mercy.'"

Steven T. Corneliussen, a media analyst for the American Institute of Physics, monitors three national newspapers, the weeklies Nature *and* Science*, and occasionally other publications. His reports to AIP are published in 'Science and the media.' He has published op-eds in the* Washington Post *and other newspapers, has written for NASA's history program, and is a science writer at a particle-accelerator laboratory.*

Steven T. Corneliussen
Unabomber copycat bomb injures Mexican scientists
Essay in Nature urges colleagues to ensure their own security while the Chronicle takes a closer look at the group behind the attacks.
25 August 2011

<pubs.aip.org/physicstoday/Online/17681/Unabomber-copycat-bomb-injures-Mexican-scientists>.
DOI:10.1063/PT.4.0271
American Institute of Physics