



FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION  
INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN

Weapons of Mass Destruction Directorate, Global Terrorism Unit  
Seattle Division, Field Intelligence Group  
16 October 2015

**(U//FOUO) Black Market Web Site Users Will Likely Continue to Employ  
Covert Shipping Tradecraft to Deliver Biological Toxins**

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(U//LES) The FBI assesses it is very likely<sup>a</sup> individuals involved in the trafficking of biological toxins on black market Web sites will continue to successfully employ covert shipping tradecraft to conceal the toxins and hinder law enforcement detection. This assessment is made with high confidence,<sup>b</sup> based on reporting from multiple sensitive sources with excellent access, FBI investigations, and open source information. Sellers of biological toxins will continue to conceal these materials in commercial products, such as candles or nutritional supplements, for shipment. Users of these Web sites provide concealment expertise through dissemination of smuggling manuals and through anecdotal discussion of techniques used in successful covert shipments. The FBI also assesses it is likely many users of black market Web sites judge these marketplaces provide anonymity for purchases; therefore, many users are likely to continue providing shipping addresses directly or indirectly associated with their true identities for delivery of biological toxins. This assessment is made with medium confidence, based on recent FBI investigations.

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**(U) Source Summary Statement**

(U//FOUO) The information used to prepare this bulletin was derived from FBI reporting, foreign law enforcement information, and open sources from January 2014 to April 2015, with the exception of Appendix C, which draws on US Government biological toxin information from November 2007 to April 2013. Information regarding concealment methods by users of black market Web sites for delivery of biological toxins is derived from a sensitive source with excellent access and FBI-led domestic and international investigations. The FBI considers the information provided in this bulletin to be highly reliable, as the reporting was direct and based on the review of seized evidence by FBI and foreign law enforcement personnel. Information cited from black market Web sites provides additional background and insight into emerging trends involving concealment methods and postal smuggling techniques. While the FBI is confident in its assessments, further insight into the concealment and acquisition of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) materials could be gained through the recruitment of additional credible sources with direct access to black market Web sites.

<sup>a</sup> (U) See Appendix A: Expressions of Likelihood (or Probability).

<sup>b</sup> (U) See Appendix B: Confidence in Sources Supporting Assessments and Judgments.

**(U//FOUO) Concealment of Biological Toxins for Shipment**

(U//LES) The FBI assesses it is very likely users of black market Web sites will continue to employ novel methods of concealing biological toxins, such as ricin and abrin (see Appendix C), in commercial products to avoid law enforcement detection during shipment. This assessment is made with high confidence, based on recent arrests. The concealment techniques and subsequent delivery of biological toxins provide insight into the feasibility of shipping hazardous materials while avoiding discovery by law enforcement. Postal<sup>c</sup> concealment of biological toxins poses a threat to US national security by allowing criminals and extremists to acquire WMD materials for future attacks while avoiding detection.

- (U//FOUO) In December 2014, a US-based user attempted to purchase ricin from an FBI online covert employee (OCE) and requested the toxin be hidden in a black light reactive pill within a bottle of nutritional supplements, according to a criminal complaint from a US district court.<sup>1</sup> At least one other user also discussed shipping biological toxins hidden in nutritional supplements, according to a source with excellent access, some of whose reporting has been corroborated over the past five years.<sup>2</sup>
- (U//FOUO) In January 2014, a US-based user sold abrin and ricin on an identified black market Web site and concealed the toxin inside a jar candle for shipment to at least four individuals, according to a press release from a US Attorney's Office and an employee of the FBI.<sup>3, 4, 5</sup>

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**(U) Observed Concealment Methods**



(U) FBI investigations identified several methods of concealment used by black market Web users to deliver biological toxins. These methods include replacing the contents of a single pill capsule with toxin concealed inside a vitamin bottle, and hiding vials containing toxin in the wax of a jar candle.<sup>i, ii</sup>

**(U) Sources**

<sup>i</sup> (U//FOUO) FBI; Electronic Communication; 18 December 2014; 18 December 2014; "(U//FOUO) Marking and Packing of Ricin Simulant for Shipment to FBI New York"; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; Source is an employee of the FBI.

<sup>ii</sup> (U) FBI; Electronic Communication; 24 January 2014; 15 January 2014; "(U) X-ray of images of candles"; UNCLASSIFIED; UNCLASSIFIED; Source is an employee of the FBI.

(U//LES) The FBI assesses it is very likely users of black market Web sites will likely continue to exchange information regarding methods for concealing illicit materials in packages to avoid

<sup>c</sup> (U) For purposes of this product, the term "postal" refers to all mail delivery systems, including, but not limited to, the US Postal Service (USPS), Federal Express, and United Parcel Service.

law enforcement detection during shipment. This assessment is made with high confidence, based on FBI investigations and open source information. These methods are intended to evade postal screening procedures and facilitate surreptitious delivery of illicit materials through the postal system, which could enhance the ability of users, specifically those acting in furtherance of criminal or extremist<sup>d</sup> agendas, to avoid law enforcement detection when acquiring biological toxins for targeted killings or small-scale attacks.

- (U//LES) As of 14 April 2015, at least nine users were selling an instruction manual, titled *Guide to Postal Smuggling*, on an identified black market Web site.<sup>6</sup> A review of the guide, purportedly written by a USPS employee, provided instructions for concealing illicit materials using candles, chocolates, and video cassette tapes, according to a documentary source.<sup>7, 8, 9, 10</sup> The guide also provided recommendations for removing trace evidence from packaging using rubbing alcohol, according to a documentary source, according to open source information.<sup>11</sup>
- (U) On 30 March 2015, a user recommended mailers use exact postage on a USPS priority flat rate box or envelope and drop the package into a postal box to remain anonymous, according to open source information.<sup>12</sup>
- (U) On 18 February 2015, a user advised mailers to use cash to pay for postage, rotate drop boxes in different cities, vary return labels, eliminate excessive taping, and wear a fresh pair of gloves while handling the package for operational security. The Web user also cautioned against packages having any visible stains or leaks, which would prompt postal employees to open the package, according to open source information.<sup>13</sup>

#### **(U) Delivery Information Provided for Shipment of Biological Toxins**

(U//LES) The FBI assesses it is likely individuals purchasing biological toxins through black market Web sites will continue to provide shipping addresses to which they are connected for delivery of the toxins. This assessment is made with medium confidence, based on recent FBI investigations. While some users have provided the addresses of their personal residences or post office boxes, other users have provided addresses for which they are indirectly associated, including residences of significant others or neighbors. Most users of black market Web sites likely perceive the use of anonymizers, layered and encrypted Internet routing schemas, encrypted communications, and online monikers provide a veil of anonymity and prevent shipping details from being identified by law enforcement. Moreover, most users of black market Web sites are unable or unwilling to develop anonymous drop locations, as they often lack the necessary resources and coordination to create, manage, and use facilities to send and receive illicit materials without generating suspicion.

- (U//FOUO) In early February 2015, a UK-based user on an identified black market Web site attempted to purchase ricin from an FBI OCE and provided a delivery address determined to be the Web user's residence, according to a sensitive source with excellent access and an employee of the Greater Manchester Police.<sup>14, 15</sup>

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<sup>d</sup> (U//FOUO) For purposes of this bulletin, the term "extremists" includes international terrorists, homegrown violent extremists, domestic terrorists, and lone offenders.

- (U//FOUO) In December 2014, a US-based user attempted to purchase ricin on an identified black market Web site from an FBI OCE and provided a delivery address of a mailbox owned by the Web user in an identified shipping store, according to a sensitive source with excellent access and a criminal complaint from a US district court.<sup>16, 17</sup>
- (U//FOUO) In early November 2014, an Ireland-based user attempted to purchase ricin from an FBI OCE on an identified black mark Web site and provided a delivery address belonging to a vacant home immediately next door to the user's residence, according to a sensitive source with excellent access.<sup>18</sup>
- (U//FOUO) In early December 2013, a US-based user purchased abrin on an identified black market Web site and had it shipped to a residential address, later identified as belonging to the user, according to an employee of the FBI.<sup>19</sup>

### **(U) Perspective**

(U//FOUO) While prior intelligence products addressed vulnerabilities within the postal sector that could be used in furtherance of a WMD attack, this is the first known FBI and USIC product that addresses tradecraft used by actors to ship WMD materials. Additionally, prior intelligence products addressing the availability of WMD materials on black market Web sites do not address shipment tradecraft. This intelligence bulletin represents the FBI's first assessment on shipping tradecraft employed by users of black market Web sites to sell or acquire WMD materials, specifically biological toxins.

### **(U) Analysis of Alternatives**

(U//LES) While the FBI assesses it is likely individuals seeking to sell or acquire biological toxins will continue to employ covert shipping tradecraft, it is possible users will evolve their tradecraft to include additional layers of separation from the online purchases to avoid personal attribution and detection of the materials. This shift might be a natural progression of the tradecraft, based in part on recent media coverage of arrests that disclosed tradecraft. While no transactions involving biological toxins have been identified as using reshippers and very few have used unrelated shipping locations to deliver the materials, the FBI judges these would be the most likely evolutions in tradecraft and would impact the FBI's assessment on overcoming shipping methodologies.<sup>e</sup> The FBI further assesses there are limited indicators, which would suggest a shift towards using reshippers to facilitate these transactions; however, potential signs would be:

- (U//LES) Identification of individuals making frequent visits to postal facilities and wearing protective gear (for example, gloves or a mask) to repackage contents for immediate reshipment;
- (U//LES) Postings to black market Web sites recommending the use of reshippers; or

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<sup>e</sup> (U//FOUO) Reshipping services function as an intermediary between a buyer and seller by forwarding packages to a predetermined address to protect against the disclosure of users' shipping information.

- (U//LES) Specific listings by users on black market Web sites advertising reshipping services.

## **(U) Outlook**

(U//LES) The FBI assesses it is very likely black market Web sites will continue to pose a significant challenge for law enforcement efforts to identify criminal actors attempting to sell or acquire biological toxins due to the enhanced anonymity these services provide, including the use of anonymizers, encrypted communications, and online monikers. This assessment is made with high confidence, based on reporting from multiple sensitive sources with excellent access, FBI investigations, and open source information. Significant vulnerabilities exist for black market Web users, however, since the exchange of physical items requires buyers submit address details to vendors to facilitate shipment. Individuals purchasing toxins will likely continue to provide shipping addresses associated with their true identities, due to the perceived anonymity of black market Web site transactions and complications associated with establishing seemingly unrelated or anonymous package drop locations. The FBI arrested or facilitated the arrest of twelve<sup>f</sup> individuals alleged to be using black market Web sites to sell or purchase biological toxins since December 2013; all twelve individuals were identified through law enforcement engagement with users and exploitation of shipping information, which revealed the users' true identities.

(U//LES) The FBI additionally assesses it is very likely individuals selling or purchasing biological toxins on black market Web sites will continue to implement covert shipping methods when delivering the materials to prevent the detection of suspicious parcels by shipping service providers. This assessment is made with high confidence, based on reporting from multiple sensitive sources with excellent access, FBI investigations, and open source information. Sellers will continue to seek or demonstrate innovative methods of concealing the toxins within commercial products for shipment. Further development of FBI confidential human sources and liaisons with access to domestic and international shipping services would likely enhance the FBI's ability to identify and apprehend individuals shipping or receiving packages containing biological toxins through the identification of potential indicators. Potential indicators of postal tradecraft employed to ship or receive biological toxins include, but are not limited to:

- (U//LES) Use of latex gloves for mail handling;
- (U//LES) Late-night drops at isolated postal boxes;
- (U//LES) Physical alterations to obscure facial recognition;
- (U//LES) Frequent mail delivery to vacant residences;
- (U//LES) Frequent visits to postal facilities;
- (U//LES) Bulk acquisition of shipping labels; and
- (U//LES) Repackaging contents for immediate reshipment.

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<sup>f</sup> (U//LES) Eight of the twelve black market Web users identified by the FBI as having trafficked biological toxins since December 2013 were located outside the United States and were arrested following FBI engagement with law enforcement partners in Austria, Canada, Denmark, France, and the United Kingdom.

**(U) Intelligence Requirements Addressed in Paper**

(U//FOUO) This intelligence bulletin addresses requirements contained in the FBI National Standing Intelligence Collection Requirements for Terrorist/Criminal Acquisition and Use of Biological Weapons contained in WW-WMDB-WMD-SR-0099-11.I.B.3, WW-WMDB-WMD-SR-0099-11.I.C.2, WW-WMDB-WMD-SR-0099-11.I.C.7, WW-WMDB-WMD-SR-0099-11.II.A.1B, WW-WMDB-WMD-SR-0099-11.II.B.1, WW-WMDB-WMD-SR-0099-11.II.B.2, WW-WMDB-WMD-SR-0099-11.IV.A.1, and WW-WMDB-WMD-SR-0099-11.IV.A.2.

(U//FOUO) This intelligence bulletin was prepared by the Global Terrorism Unit (GTU) of the Intelligence Analysis Section and the Weapons of Mass Destruction Directorate of the FBI, in coordination with the Seattle Field Office of the FBI. Comments and queries may be addressed to the GTU Unit Chief by calling 202-324-6846, or the Seattle Field Intelligence Group by calling 206-262-2309.

**(U) Appendix A: Expressions of Likelihood (or Probability)**

(U) Phrases such as “the FBI judges” and “the FBI assesses,” and terms such as “likely” and “probably” convey analytical judgments and assessments. The chart approximates how expressions of likelihood and probability correlate with percentages of chance.

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<i>Terms of Likelihood</i>	<b>Almost No Chance</b>	<b>Very Unlikely</b>	<b>Unlikely</b>	<b>Roughly Even Chance</b>	<b>Likely</b>	<b>Very Likely</b>	<b>Almost Certain(ly)</b>
<i>Terms of Probability</i>	<b>Remote</b>	<b>Highly Improbable</b>	<b>Improbable (Improbably)</b>	<b>Roughly Even Odds</b>	<b>Probable (Probably)</b>	<b>Highly Probable</b>	<b>Nearly Certain</b>
	<b>1-5%</b>	<b>5-20%</b>	<b>20-45%</b>	<b>45-55%</b>	<b>55-80%</b>	<b>80-95%</b>	<b>95-99%</b>

(U) Unless otherwise stated, the FBI does not derive judgments via statistical analysis.

**(U) Appendix B: Confidence in Sources Supporting Assessments and Judgments**

(U) Confidence levels reflect the quality and quantity of the source information supporting judgment. Consequently, the FBI ascribes high, medium, or low levels of confidence to assessments, as follows:

(U) **High confidence** generally indicates the FBI's judgments are based on high quality information, from multiple sources. High confidence in a judgment does not imply the assessment is a fact or a certainty; such judgments might be wrong. While additional reporting and information sources may change analytical judgments, such changes are most likely to be refinements and not substantial in nature.

(U) **Medium confidence** generally means the information is credibly sourced and plausible but not of sufficient quality or corroborated sufficiently to warrant a higher level of confidence. Additional reporting or information sources have the potential to increase the FBI's confidence levels or substantively change analytical judgments.

(U) **Low confidence** generally means the information's credibility or plausibility is uncertain, the information is too fragmented or poorly corroborated to make solid analytic inferences, or the reliability of the sources is questionable. Absent additional reporting or information sources, analytical judgments should be considered preliminary in nature.



## (U) Appendix C: Information on Biological Toxins

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(U) Figure 1: Overview of Ricin



(U) Ricin is a plant toxin naturally present in the seeds (beans) produced by the castor plant. The toxin can be extracted from the beans and used as a poison by ingestion, injection, or inhalation. Once the ricin toxin enters the human body, it inhibits the synthesis of essential proteins within cells, which can lead to cell death. Symptoms of ricin poisoning may appear within hours, depending on the route of exposure and amount absorbed, and can include difficulty breathing, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, with possible death within 36 to 72 hours.

(U) There is no known antidote for ricin and treatment is limited to supportive care. Outside the body, ricin can be inactivated by bleach or high temperature.<sup>i, ii</sup>

## (U) Sources

<sup>i</sup> (U//FOUO) FBI; Intelligence Assessment; 7 November 2007; (U//FOUO) *Ricin Still Attractive*; UNCLASSIFIED; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; Photos.

<sup>ii</sup> (U) Online Publication; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; "Questions and Answers About Ricin"; 17 April 2013; <http://emergency.cdc.gov/agent/ricin/qa.asp>; accessed on 9 August 2013; The source is a US Government agency that is a worldwide leader in public health issues.

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(U) Figure 2: Overview of Abrin



(U) Abrin is a highly toxic protein derived from the seeds—jequirity beans—of the Rosary Pea plant. It is similar in molecular structure, properties, and poisoning characteristics to ricin; however, its overall toxicity is approximately 75 times greater than ricin. The Rosary Pea plant grows naturally in India and other parts of tropical Asia but can also be found as an invasive species in the Caribbean and the United States—Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, and Hawaii. Like ricin, seeds and plants can also be purchased in local plant supply stores and through the Internet. Commercial uses for jequirity beans include jewelry-making and percussion instruments. Abrin is currently being investigated as a cancer treatment and has been used with some success as an analgesic in terminally ill patients.<sup>i</sup>

## (U) Source

<sup>i</sup> (U) Review Article; J Bioterr Biodef S7:002 10.4172/2157-2526.S7-002; "Bioterrorism & Biodefense: Of Beans and Beads: Ricin and Abrin in Bioterrorism and Biocrime"; 2012; p. 2; The source is a US Government agency that researches countermeasures against biological warfare.

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**(U) Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> (U//FOUO) Department of Justice; US District Court, Southern District of New York, Criminal Complaint; 1:14-mj-02881-UA; 24 December 2014; 23 December 2014; “(U//FOUO) United States of America v. Cheng Le a/k/a ‘William Lee,’ a/k/a ‘Daniel Chunn,’ a/k/a ‘Steven Phanatasio’”; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; Source is a criminal complaint from a US district court.

<sup>2</sup> (U//FOUO) FBI; Electronic Communication; 21 January 2014; 16 January 2014; “(U) Opening;” UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; Source is a collaborative source with excellent access, some of whose reporting has been corroborated over the past five years.

<sup>3</sup> (U) Press Release; US Attorney’s Office, District of New Jersey; 14-291; “Florida Man Admits Role In International Murder Conspiracy And Sale And Smuggling Of Deadly Toxins”; 12 August 2014; Source is a press release from a US Attorney’s office.

<sup>4</sup> (U//FOUO) FBI; Electronic Communication; 7 March 2014; 25 February 2014; “(U//FOUO) Proffer of [Name Withheld]”; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; Source is an employee of the FBI.

<sup>5</sup> (U//FOUO) FBI; Electronic Communication; 23 May 2014; 21 May 2014; “(U) 2nd Proffer of [Name Withheld]”; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; Source is an employee of the FBI.

<sup>6</sup> (U) Internet Site; Nucleus Market; 14 April 2015; nucleuspf3izq7o6.onion/find/itmes/smuggling; accessed on 14 April 2015; Source is an open source.

<sup>7</sup> (U//LES) FBI; Electronic Communication; 8 July 2014; 1 July 2014; “(U//LES) Guide Postal Smuggling.pdf”; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE; Source is an open source.

<sup>8</sup> (U//LES) FBI; Electronic Communication; 25 August 2014; 20 July 2014; “(U//LES) Guide to Postal Smuggling #1 cocacola.pdf”; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE; Source is an open source.

<sup>9</sup> (U//LES) FBI; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE; 25 August 2014; 20 July 2014; “(U//LES) Guide Postal Smuggling from fake.pdf”; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; Source is an open source.

<sup>10</sup> (U//FOUO) FBI; UNCLASSIFIED//LAW ENFORCEMENT SENSITIVE; 20 April 2015; 19 April 2015; “(U//FOUO) \_data\_anonfiles\_1376828303402.pdf”; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; Source is an open source.

<sup>11</sup> (U) *Op. cit.*, endnote 7.

<sup>12</sup> (U) Internet site; Nucleus Market; 30 March 2015; Z34uj4opd3tejafn.onion/viewtopic.php?id=2223; accessed on 6 May 2015; Source is an open source.

<sup>13</sup> (U) Internet site; Nucleus Market; 18 February 2015; Z34uj4opd3tejafn.onion/viewtopic.php?id=676; accessed on 6 May 2015; Source is an open source.

<sup>14</sup> (U//FOUO) FBI; Electronic Communication; 11 February 2015; 6 February 2015; “(U//FOUO) Communication with moniker weirdos0000 through 2/6/2015”; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; Source is a sensitive source with excellent access.

<sup>15</sup> (U//FOUO) FBI; Electronic Communication; 11 February 2015; 5 February 2015; “(U//FOUO) Identification of Mohammed Ammer Ali”; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; Source is an employee of the Greater Manchester Police.

<sup>16</sup> (U//FOUO) FBI; Electronic Communication; 18 December 2014; 18 December 2014; “(U//FOUO) Communication With moniker WhenInDoubt, aka fnufnu, through 12/18/2014”; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; Source is a sensitive source with excellent access.

<sup>17</sup> (U) *Op. cit.*, endnote 1.

<sup>18</sup> (U//FOUO) FBI; Electronic Communication; 12 January 2015; 12 January 2015; “(U//FOUO) Communication with moniker bloodhound55 through 1/12/2015”; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY; Source is a sensitive source with excellent access.

<sup>19</sup> (U) FBI; Electronic Communication; 13 May 2014; “(U) Opening EC – Preliminary Investigation”; UNCLASSIFIED; UNCLASSIFIED; Source is an employee of the FBI.

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