

Teenager sentenced to Department of Youth Services until 21 for 'Swatting' threats

An investigation by the Massachusetts State Police Computer Crimes Unit, other MSP units, the Essex District Attorney's Office, and other agencies resulted in a guilty plea late last month by a 17-year-old Andover male in connection with several "swatting" incidents. "Swatting" is the slang term for using the Internet to anonymously make hoax threats, including bomb threats.

The investigation that led to the suspect began in early April following "swatting" phone calls that were received in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, and Florida. Massachusetts State Troopers assigned to the Computer Crimes Unit, Bomb Squad, Crime Scene Services Section, and Joint Terrorism Task Force, as well as troopers from the Rhode Island State Police, FBI and Homeland Security agents and Andover Police officers executed a search warrant in furtherance of the investigation.

The suspect's residence was searched for digital media with the assistance of the MSP Computer Crimes Unit's K-9 "Winnie," a dog specially trained in detecting hidden electronic devices. Investigators located an anonabox router – a device that allows a user to anonymously connect to the Internet – in the suspect's bedroom. Numerous digital devices were seized for forensic examination, which revealed evidence of online messaging between a group of online hackers talking about bomb threats they had conducted.

The investigation determined that the teenager was the leader

of a group of online hackers who used anonymous Internet service providers to conduct bomb threats and swatting calls across the United States. Investigators interviewed the teenager, who admitted to destroying evidence just prior to police conducting the search warrant.

Investigators learned that the teenager had made swatting calls on April 15 to Jordan's IMAX Theaters in Natick and Reading, and had also previously made swatting 911 calls to Florida, New York and Rhode Island. The juvenile also made calls to residents in Wilmington and Woburn. The juvenile was familiar with more than a dozen locations in Massachusetts that received swatting threats, and was also aware of bomb threats made to locations in Little Falls, N.Y., and Spring Valley, N.Y.

The suspect was indicted by the office of Essex District Attorney Jonathan Blodget. Faced with the evidence collected during the investigation, the suspect pleaded guilty last month to conspiracy and bomb threat charges. Prosecutors requested a 3- to 5-year state prison sentence. A judge, however, sentenced the teenager to Department of Youth Services custody until his 21st birthday.