



Written by [Mary McHugh](#) on December 13, 2010

Controlled Fire Safely Destroys CA “Bomb House”

Authorities spent the weekend checking and clearing the property in Escondido, California, 25 miles north of San Diego, where a demolition team burned down the so-called “bomb house” on Thursday, December 9. The single story, wood-framed house had been the focus of investigations since November 18 when a gardener was injured by explosives there. A resident of the house, 54-year-old Serbian native George Jakubec, an unemployed software engineer who has been in the United States for over 20 years, was arrested in conjunction with the discovery of what officials called the largest cache of homemade bomb-making materials ever found in this country.



The [burn](#) was touched off by remote control and a few minutes later the home was fully aflame. A fireplace and brick chimney were all that remained standing by the afternoon; no one was hurt and nothing nearby was damaged. Officials declared the operation a success.

The house, appraised in January 2006 for \$517,000, was purchased at that time by Michele Holt, a San Francisco-area woman who has yet to comment on the events. It was rented to Jakubec and his wife four years ago. According to a Reuters report:

[Jakubec] was arrested last month after police found the dwelling crammed with high explosives, bomb-making materials, handmade grenades, guns and ammunition mixed in with paper and other debris piled floor to ceiling.

Bomb disposal experts ultimately decided the volatile contents of the house made it too dangerous to clear out and process as a crime scene, leaving them no alternative but to burn it to the ground.

Authorities have not suggested a possible motive for the bomb collection.

Besides being charged with one count of possessing explosive devices and one count of illegal manufacture of explosives, Jakubec was also charged last week in a federal indictment with three bank robberies and one attempted bank holdup during the past two years, as well as two counts of brandishing a firearm during a robbery. One [Reuters](#) account reported that he pled not guilty last Monday, December 6, to all eight charges, which carry a possible maximum penalty of 20 years, while a later Reuters account claimed court documents indicated Jakubec admitted to the three bank holdups. He is currently being held in federal detention without bail.

Jakubec’s attorneys attempted to delay the incineration of the home by filing of an emergency motion in U.S. District Court in San Diego late Tuesday. According to reports, they claimed

... that Thursday’s planned burning of the house — deemed too dangerous to clear out and process as a crime scene — is not only unsafe but will destroy evidence needed to defend Jakubec.



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“Papers, journals, and other items in the house may help Mr. Jakubec prove his intent or his mental state,” the motion states. “The alleged explosives in the home may themselves prove to be harmless, lawfully owned, or in some other way less inculpatory than the charges suggest.”

But FBI bomb technician James Verdi testified at Wednesday’s court hearing that explosive chemicals detected throughout the cluttered house were too volatile to be safely removed.

One type of chemical, called HMTD, is so unstable that it can be set off by “someone stepping on it,” Verdi said.

He said agents had found evidence of past explosions in the house, including a sliding glass door and windows that had been blown out and boarded up and buckled, soot-covered walls.

In the end, U.S. Magistrate Judge Larry Burns said he saw no reason to delay the planned incineration.

“I see substantial detriment,” he said, adding, “If I knew there was a house with bombs and volatile chemicals near my house, I wouldn’t sleep at night.”

The San Diego County Sheriff’s office had already removed some of the explosives and safely detonated them on the property. Rather than further risk any accidental explosions while searching or cleaning the dwelling, the department then made the decision to have the home deliberately destroyed.

Officials took careful precautions before setting the house ablaze. About 50 agencies were involved in the burn operation, including firefighters and sheriff’s deputies, as well as hazardous materials specialists and bomb squad experts. Because some neighboring homes were only 20 feet from the house, a 16-foot high barrier was erected around the house and guarded by officials for several days before the fire. The closest homes were sprayed ahead of time with fire-retardant foam and gel, surrounding trees and brush were cleared, and a nearby section of Interstate 15 was shut down for nearly two hours. Before the 11:00 a.m. burn, about 200 families were advised to evacuate from 60 nearby homes. Those who did were allowed back a few hours later.

The burn itself was monitored by special devices indicating “a brief spike [of] toxicity levels around the blaze before air quality returned to normal,” officials reported. Before the fire, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger issued an emergency declaration that protected the state from any liability involved with the demolition.

Officials will be checking the Escondido site to ensure that all explosive materials are destroyed and toxic materials removed. The clean-up operation is expected to take five days.

Photo: Fire department officials spray fire retardant on a structure next to the home of an explosive-laden house officials plan to burn to the ground in Escondido, Calif. on Dec. 9, 2010: AP Images



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