

HAVE 1,485 INNOCENT AMERICANS BEEN INVESTIGATED FOR RESEARCHING PRESSURE COOKERS?

Update: One of Catalano's family members' former employers tipped off the local cops to searches for backpack and pressure cooker on their computer.

I have been warning about the criminalization of common items since it became clear in 2009 the FBI had investigated 3 purported (and apparently innocent) Najibullah Zazi "associates" for buying beauty supplies.

So I am thoroughly unsurprised that Michele Catalano's family got questioned by 6 members of the Joint Terrorism Task Force because she researched pressure cookers online and her husband researched backpacks and her son clicked stories describing the Boston Marathon bomb.

I had researched pressure cookers. My husband was looking for a backpack. And maybe in another time those two things together would have seemed innocuous, but we are in "these times" now. And in these times, when things like the Boston bombing happen, you spend a lot of time on the internet reading about it and, if you are my exceedingly curious news junkie of a twenty-year-old son, you click a lot of links when you read the myriad of stories. You might just read a CNN piece about how bomb making instructions are readily available on the internet and you will in all probability, if you are that kid, click the link provided.

Which might not raise any red flags. Because who wasn't reading those

stories? Who wasn't clicking those links? But my son's reading habits combined with my search for a pressure cooker and my husband's search for a backpack set off an alarm of sorts at the joint terrorism task force headquarters.

It seems to have worked out okay for this apparently comfortable and apparently white family (though I am curious whether the FBI had investigated her husband's business trips to Korea and China before they showed up).

But this was just one JTTF squad. And that JTTF told her husband that they conduct 100 such investigations a week.

They mentioned that they do this about 100 times a week. And that 99 of those visits turn out to be nothing. I don't know what happens on the other 1% of visits and I'm not sure I want to know what my neighbors are up to.

It has been 15 weeks since the Boston Marathon attack. While I'm sure all these searches, by this one JTTF, weren't in search of pressure cookers, just imagine that 100 pressure cooker investigations a week have been conducted by all JTTFs together? That would mean 1,485 innocent Americans – plus the 15 the FBI considers not so innocent or perhaps worthy of entrapment – have been targeted because of completely innocent First Amendment online searches.

But don't worry. Keith Alexander and James Clapper assure you they're not watching Americans' communications.