

FBI BRAGS ABOUT SOLVING NOT-TERRORIST NOT-HACKER ATTACK ON THE GRID

As part of its PR feed, the FBI routinely sends out self-summaries of some of its case. Today, it sent out [this one](#), on Jason Woodring, who took a plea deal in June for several counts of destruction of an energy facility.

Back in 2013, the self-employed, live with mom, pool cleaner and heavy meth user, did (if you believe the energy companies affected, which the judge did when assessing a fine) millions of dollars of damage to transmission equipment.

On the afternoon of August 21, 2013, the FBI's Little Rock Field Office was notified by a local energy provider about a downed 500,000-volt power line near an active railroad track in Cabot, Arkansas. A power outage ensued. Company officials and local law enforcement believed that very early in the morning, someone had climbed a 100-foot tall support tower and intentionally sawed off the shackles that held up the power line, which then fell across the railroad tracks. A short time later, a train struck the line and severed it.

[snip]

In addition to the power line's support tower shackles being cut with a hacksaw (which had been left behind), someone had loosened most of the bolts holding the support tower to its cement base. Investigators believed that in a previous attempt to damage the support tower and take down the power line, the perpetrator had taken a steel cable-insulated in blue plastic hosing that's often used for pool

maintenance—and tied one end to the bottom of the support tower and the other end to a tree across the railroad tracks in the hopes that a train would run into the cable, pulling down the entire support tower and possibly toppling several nearby towers. Instead, the cable simply snapped when hit by the train, and the tower—and power line—remained in place. Pieces of the cable and the blue hosing from that attempt were found at the crime scene.

But then there were two more seemingly related incidents:

On September 29, 2013, again very early in the morning, an energy provider received an intruder alert at an extra-high voltage switching station in Scott, Arkansas, which was soon followed by a series of other alarms. Local law enforcement officers responded to find the station on fire. Damages in this instance exceeded \$4 million.

And on the morning of October 6, 2013, an energy provider in the Jacksonville, Arkansas area experienced a loss of power for several hours, impacting thousands of people. Not long afterward, investigators found that a 115,000-volt transmission line had fallen down after someone managed to cut into two power poles and pull down one of the poles using a tractor. Damages were close to \$50,000.

At least according to their public explanation (which may be sanitized to protect investigative methods), the FBI solved the crimes by taking a phone call from local cops, who had recognized when they responded to an explosion at Woodring's house and figured he was a likely culprit. The cops' ability to figure that out

was presumably helped because FBI had involved the local Joint Terrorism Task Force, but it appears to be local police work that busted this guy.

The FBI vaguely references anti-government statements in their release.

While Woodring's motives for his activities were not clear, he did leave some vague anti-government messages at two of the crime scenes, and at his recent sentencing hearing, he told the judge that he was trying to help society.

But [reporting](#) on Woodring make it sound more like he was trying to cast off suspicion than lead an anti-government crusade, even if he did engage in conspiracy theories.

The deputies also found a message Woodring left behind, scrawled on a metal panel near the entry gate in black marker. He wrote it with his left hand, to disguise his handwriting. It seemed to combine a slogan for Anonymous, the mysterious network of Internet activists, with an oblique reference to the federal government, a kind of paranoid double entendre.

It said: "YOU SHOULD HAVE EXPECTED U.S."

[snip]

Woodring kept up on his reading. He read the Bible. He was always surrounded by books on engineering, and had become increasingly fixated on various conspiracy theories, on "subliminal messages coming from the TV" and other plots. "He was really stuck on the whole Nostradamus thing," his friend said, referring to the 16th century French seer who supposedly predicted all manner of contemporary world-historical events in his "Prophecies."

FBI's lack of information about motive is important given that Woodring was initially charged with a terrorist attack against a rail carrier and the two destruction of an energy facility charges to which he pled guilty can merit a terrorist enhancement.

But there's not much from the public docket that suggests FBI did much beyond send Woodring to be evaluated for competence to stand defense, after which he pretty quickly pled.

I raise this for a few reasons. First, it's yet another case of a white guy doing stuff that would be treated far differently if a Muslim had done the same.

But it's also yet another example of how easy it would be to do physical damage to the government's most panicked target, the electrical grid, and so so without either terrorism or hacking.