



Owing to the developing news today (February 29, 2008) out of Las Vegas, Nevada, regarding ricin, the CBR Weapons and WMD Terrorism News presents here a special compilation of topical information on the toxin.

RICIN: THE TOXIN

Ricin, a toxin created from the waste of processed castor beans, can be weaponized as a powder, mist, or pellet. The toxin can also be dissolved in weak acid or water. Only 500 micrograms may be needed to kill an adult. Methods of exposure include ingestion, inhalation, or injection. Ricin works by counteracting the protein-making function of cells in the body, causing the cells to die, and potentially resulting in death of the organism. Symptoms after inhalation appear within 8 hours of exposure, and those for ingestion appear in less than 6 hours. Symptoms of ingestion include vomiting and diarrhea, and possibly hallucinations and seizures. Those of inhalation include difficulty breathing, fever, cough, and nausea. This, and further information, is available at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/ricin/facts.asp>.

PREVIOUS INCIDENTS INVOLVING THE USE/POSSESSION OF RICIN

On May 24, 2007, a British lab confirmed that traces of ricin had been found in an Irish prison cell. The ricin was smuggled into Ireland from the US in a contact lens case, to be used in an assassination plot. The man was arrested before the ricin could be used. The amount of ricin in the contact lens case was very small, and according to authorities did not pose a significant hazard.

On October 3, 2006, Denys Ray Hughes of Phoenix, Arizona, was sentenced to seven years in prison for the attempted manufacture of ricin. According to authorities, Hughes was a survivalist with no known ties to any terrorist organizations or extremist groups.

On January 14, 2005, Steven Michael Ekberg, of Ocala, Florida, was arrested by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for possession of a biological weapon after agents found ricin in the home he shares with his mother. Ekberg had castor beans and other products in his possession. Ekberg later pleaded guilty in federal court to possession of a biological weapon.

On February 3, 2004, ricin was found on an automatic mail sorter in the mailroom of the Dirksen Senate Office building in Washington, D.C. A specialized Marine unit trained to handle chemical and biological incidents responded to the event, and 16 employees went through decontamination procedures. The mailroom handled mail addressed to Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist. According to Frist, no one became sick.

In October 2003, a metallic container was discovered at a Greenville, South Carolina, postal facility with ricin in it. The small container was in an envelope along with a threatening note. Authorities did not believe this was a terrorism related incident. The note expressed anger against regulations overseeing the trucking industry.



On March 3, 2003, FBI agents arrested Bertier Ray Riddle in Omaha, Arkansas, on suspicion that he sent an envelope to the FBI field office in Little Rock that claimed to contain ricin. The front of the envelope sent on 19 February, reportedly stated that the letter was from a "Lee Alexander Hughes." The return address on the letter was Riddle's, but was signed "Sincerely not Bertie Ray Riddle." The front of the envelope also contained the phrase "If you make me have to claim to be my kidnapper's son, while depriving me of my correct identity you are going to hell!" The back of the envelope reportedly stated "Caution: contents contain ricin." A plastic bag containing a powder and dark flakes was discovered inside of the envelope. Test on the substance revealed that it was not ricin. On March 12, 2003, Riddle was indicted on two charges, one of mailing a threatening communication and the other of insulting a federal law enforcement officer and threatening to use a weapon of mass destruction.

On January 5, 2003, six Algerians were arrested at their apartment in London, United Kingdom on charges of "being in the possession of objects which give rise to reasonable suspicions of the intention of carrying out preparing, or instigating an act of terrorism" and for trying to "develop or produce a chemical weapon." Following the arrests, authorities discovered traces of ricin in the apartment located in Wood Green, located in northern London. They also discovered castor oil beans and equipment for crushing the beans. Those arrested are believed to be part of a terrorist cell known as the "Chechen network" which may have ties to the Algerian group behind the millennium bomb plots in the United States. Members of the cell are Algerians who received training in Chechnya and the former Soviet republic of Georgia. Five of the six arrested were identified as Mustapha Taleb, Mouloud Feddag, Sidali Feddag, Samir Feddag, and Nasreddine Fekhadji. Authorities arrested the suspects following a tip by French intelligence agencies, which had been following two of the men. Authorities stated that they believe the ricin discovered was only part of a larger batch that they believe was removed from the apartment before the arrests. Police stated that they were continuing to search for the missing ricin.

In August 2002, reports emerged that Ansar al-Islam, a Sunni militant group, has been involved in testing poisons and chemicals including ricin. According to one report the group tested ricin powder as an aerosol on animals such as donkeys and chickens and perhaps even an unwitting human subject. No more specific details have been released.

On June 19, 2002, Kenneth R. Olsen, 48, was arrested for possession of the biological agent ricin in his Spokane Valley office cubicle. Co-workers at Agilent, a high-tech company, tipped FBI officials about the software engineer after discovering documents on "how to kill," undetectable poisons, and bomb-making Olsen had printed out from his computer. Olsen insisted that his research was for a Boy Scout project, but did not say more. Further investigation of his office produced test tubes, castor beans, glass jars, and approximately 1 gram of ricin.

In August 2001, the FSB (Russian Federal Security Service) told the Itar-Tass news service it had intercepted a recorded conversation between two Chechen field commanders in which they discussed using homemade poisons against Russian troops.



According to Itar-Tass, Chechen Brigadier General Rizvan Chitigov asked Chechen field commander Hizir Alhazurov, who is now living in the United Arab Emirates, for instructions on the "homemade production of poison" for use against Russian soldiers. Russian authorities reportedly raided Chitigov's home and seized materials, including instructions on how to use toxic agents to contaminate consumer goods, a small chemical laboratory, three homemade explosives, two land mines, and 30 grenades. The confiscated papers reportedly also contained instructions on how to produce ricin from castor beans.

In November 1999, press reports indicated that FBI agents had apprehended a man in Tampa, Florida, for threatening to kill court officials and "wage biological warfare" in Jefferson County, Colorado. James Kenneth Gluck, 53, a former Colorado resident, sent a 10-page letter to Jefferson County judges threatening to kill them with a biological agent. He specifically identified one judge by name. FBI agents arrested Gluck on 5 November 1999 as he left a public library near his home in Tampa. Police, fire, and hazardous materials (HazMat) crews responded to the scene along with the FBI and blocked off Gluck's street. Upon searching his residence the next day, agents discovered that Gluck had the necessary ingredients to make ricin, though no refined ricin was actually found. They also found test tubes and beakers, as well as the "anarchist's cookbook" and books on biological toxicology, in a makeshift laboratory in his home.

On August 25, 1998, Dwayne Lee Kuehl, 38, was arrested in Escanaba, Michigan, for producing ricin with intent to use it against an Escanaba city official. Kuehl was under investigation in connection with a 1 February 1988 fire that destroyed a business that he owned. While carrying out a search warrant at Kuehl's home and his rental property, police interviewed him. During the interview, Kuehl indicated that he had obtained the recipe and ingredients for the manufacture of ricin and made the poison in 1993. He also admitted that he made the ricin in order to kill James O'Toole, an Escanaba housing inspector. Police later found the ingredients for ricin manufacture, along with other toxic substances, at two separate residences owned by Kuehl.

In March 1998, three members of a splinter group of the North American Militia in Michigan were arrested on weapons and conspiracy charges. The April 1998 indictment was the result of an investigation involving an Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) agent who infiltrated the group in March 1997. When federal law enforcement raided the homes of these men, they discovered an arsenal of weapons and a videotape. Produced in a cooking-show format, the tape gave instructions on how to manufacture bombs and other assorted militia-type weaponry, including a feature segment on how to extract ricin from castor beans. During the court proceedings, prosecutors drew attention to the ricin segment, stating that the men were "collecting information on the manufacture and use of ricin." However, other than the videotape, no materials associated with ricin production were found in any of the raids.

On April 1, 1997, Internal Revenue Service (IRS) investigators searched the home of James Dalton Bell, a 39-year-old electronics engineer, and discovered a cache of chemicals, which included sodium cyanide (500 grams), diisopropyl flourophosphate,



and a range of corrosive acids. Subsequent analysis of computer files confiscated from the residence revealed that Bell engaged in e-mail communications with a friend, Robert East, a 46-year-old merchant marine radio operator, that expressed a desire to obtain castor beans to see if they could extract ricin. Bell had already acquired the home addresses of nearly 100 federal employees from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), IRS, and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms; and computer files from voter registration. Bell was in the process of producing and acquiring chemical and biological agents.

On January 17, 1997, authorities discovered various toxic substances in the house of Thomas Leahy in Janesville, Wisconsin. They discovered the substances after they had been called to Leahy's home after he had shot his son in the face, following a night of drinking. Among the chemicals discovered were 0.67 grams of ricin and nicotine mixed with a solvent that allowed it to penetrate the skin and have lethal effects. Authorities also found books relating to the production of chemical and biological agents. Chemicals were also found in a storage shed that Leahy kept in Harvard, Illinois. He reportedly told his sister that he was going to use the poison to coat razor blades and mail them to his enemies in hopes that they would cut themselves and become infected. Leahy pleaded guilty to possession of the ricin and was sentenced to eight years for the shooting and six-and-one-half years for possessing dangerous materials.

On December 20, 1995, Thomas Lewis Lavy was arrested in Onia, Arkansas, for possession of ricin. In April 1993, Lavy was caught while trying to smuggle 130 grams of ricin from Alaska into Canada. Lavy stated that he purchased the ricin to poison coyotes on his farm in Arkansas and keep them away from his chickens. Lavy was stopped at the Beaver Creek border crossing by Canadian custom agents who found, along with the 130 grams of ricin, \$89,000, a knife, four guns, and 20,000 rounds of ammunition. Lavy was charged with possession of a toxic substance with intent to use it as a weapon. At the time of Lavy's arrest, FBI agents found castor beans and copies of one book describing how to extract ricin from castor beans, and another discussing ways to poison people with toxic compounds. Lavy was ordered to be held until a January court date in Alaska, but committed suicide in his prison cell before the trial.

On August 22, 1995, Dr. Ray W. Mettetal, Jr., a 44-year-old neurologist at Rockingham Memorial Hospital in Harrisonburg, Virginia, was apprehended at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, Tennessee, carrying a six-inch veterinarian's syringe with a four-inch needle filled with boric acid and salt water (contact lens solution), which could prove lethal if injected into the heart. He allegedly planned to use the syringe to murder Dr. George S. Allen, his former supervisor when he was a neurology resident at Vanderbilt in the 1980s. After the arrest, police searched a storage unit rented by Mettetal in Harrisonburg, Virginia, in which they found toxic chemicals and several books on assassination and producing chemical and biological agents. Also among the items was a small glass jar containing the toxin ricin, notes documenting Allen's whereabouts, maps of the campus where Allen worked, and photographs of his house. These notebooks alleged that Mettetal planned to soak pages of a book with a ricin-solvent mixture that could promote the movement of the toxin through the skin once introduced. After the



ricin was discovered in his possession, a federal case was brought against Mettetal. He was also charged with the federal offense of providing false information (e.g., the false identity of Steven Ray Maupin) to the U.S. Postal Service.

On August 7, 1995, Michael Farrar, a 40-year-old cardiologist, was hospitalized with a mysterious illness. On two additional occasions, Farrar was hospitalized for exhibiting similar unexplained symptoms. At first, doctors believed his problems were connected to his recent trip to South America, and it was not until 25 September 1995 that ricin was considered the cause. On that day, Farrar called police during a domestic dispute with his estranged wife, Debora Green, a 44-year-old non-practicing oncologist. The police report stated that due to her bizarre behavior, Green was taken to a psychiatric clinic that night. Finding castor beans in his wife's purse, Farrar turned the beans and sales receipt over to police. Green had purchased the castor beans through special order from a garden center in Kansas City, Missouri, and placed them in Farrar's food. It is unclear if she extracted the ricin or merely added the beans to the food. Later, Farrar had to undergo multiple heart and brain surgeries related to the poisoning.

In 1994 and 1995, four Minnesota men were the first to be tried and convicted under the 1989 Biological Weapons Anti-Terrorism Act, for the possession of ricin. Douglas Baker, Leroy Wheeler, Dennis Henderson, and Richard Oelrich acquired this deadly substance in an alleged plot to kill local deputy sheriffs, U.S. Marshals, and IRS agents. The four men were members of a radical tax-protesting militia organization called the Minnesota Patriots Council. The Minnesota Patriots Council was founded by Colonel (Retired) Frank Nelson of the United States Air Force in 1970. The right-wing organization opposed the notion of a federal government and refused to recognize any authority above the local county. Its members protested U.S. taxation policies and met periodically in small groups, or cells. Some militant adherents of the group even met to discuss violent methods (such as blowing up buildings) to combat what they perceived as tyrannical, illegitimate federal authorities. In 1991, Oelrich, Henderson, and Wheeler came across a classified notice in a right-wing publication advertising a mail order ricin kit. The three ordered the ricin kit in April 1991 and intended to mix the ricin with chemicals in order to create an effective delivery system. In early 1992, Henderson took the mixture containing ricin to his friend Douglas Baker's house, where it was stored in a coffee can along with a cautionary note. Following a marital dispute, Baker's wife, Colette, took the coffee can along with several other weapons to the local sheriff's office, which in turn contacted the FBI. It was determined that the coffee can contained 0.7 grams of ricin that was reportedly capable of killing hundreds of people. Baker and Wheeler were arrested on August 4, 1994, and stood trial for the possession of a deadly biological substance at the Federal District Court in St. Paul, Minnesota. The two received two-year-and-nine-months prison terms followed by three-year probationary periods. Henderson and Oelrich were arrested in July and August of 1995, respectively. The two had fled and gone underground upon the news of their co-conspirators' arrests. They stood trial in October and were also convicted of producing and possessing the poisonous substance. In January 1996, Henderson was sentenced to 48 months in prison followed by three years of probation, and Oelrich received a 37-month prison term and three years of probation.



In 1983, Montgomery Todd Meeks, 19, was tried for attempting to murder his father with ricin. He claimed that the act was motivated by his father's abuse. He conducted research on poisons, decided on ricin, and then purchased the material from Aardvark Enterprises in Louisville, Kentucky, for \$200. A classmate went to Kentucky to pick up the purchase, but emptied the vial of ricin into a toilet when he returned to Orlando International Airport. It was alleged that Meeks continued with the murder plan and ceased only when a friend went to the police.

In 1983, two brothers were arrested by the FBI for producing an ounce of pure ricin, which they stored in a 35-mm canister. Officials were directed to the brothers after receiving a tip from an informant. The FBI took the material to the U.S. Army laboratories at Ft. Detrick where it was destroyed.

In 1982 Texas attorney William A. Chanslor, 50, was sentenced to jail for three years and fined \$5,000 for plotting to kill his 39-year-old wife with ricin. He claims that he wanted the ricin to assist his wife in committing suicide. She was paralyzed after having a stroke in 1979. She begged the jury not to convict Chanslor. He put ads in two paramilitary magazines, *Soldier of Fortune* and *Gung Ho*. His ads said, "Wanted: experts in poisons and chemical agents with access to same." He also read at least one book that included information on the toxin. When Chanslor contacted the author of a book on toxins, regarding the acquisition of ricin, the author contacted Canadian law enforcement officials. Police then recorded a meeting between the two where Chanslor purchased a tablet supposedly containing ricin for \$2,500. On August 4, 1982, facing a penalty of 20 years in prison, Chanslor was sentenced to three years in prison and fined \$5,000.

In 1978, Bulgarian dissident Georgii Markov was assassinated with ricin toxin by an operative of the Bulgarian secret service.

JAMES MARTIN CENTER FOR NONPROLIFERATION STUDIES EXPERTS ON BIOLOGICAL AND TOXIN WEAPONS

Dr. Raymond Zilinskas
Director of the Chemical and Biological Weapons Nonproliferation Program (CBWNP)
rzilinskas@miis.edu

Dr. Jonathan B. Tucker
Senior Researcher, Washington, D.C. Office
jtucker@miis.edu

Dr. Burke Zimmerman
Senior Fellow, CBWNP
burke.zimmerman@miis.edu