



Tribune photos by Jim Prisching

Investigators in biohazard suits are washed off outside a Lake in the Hills home that was searched Monday for a toxin.

FBI: Fake doctor held in toxin sting

Lake in the Hills man allegedly sought it online

By Jeff Long and Carolyn Starks
TRIBUNE REPORTERS

Federal authorities on Monday charged a Lake in the Hills man with possession of a pufferfish toxin in an amount that one expert said could kill almost 100 people.

Edward F. Bachner IV, 35, who allegedly posed as a doctor when ordering the poison known as tetrodotoxin, was arrested about 10:30 a.m. Monday when he met an undercover federal agent who delivered the toxin to him in Algonquin, officials said.

Bachner recently ordered 98 milligrams of the toxin, which is usually used in research, from a New Jersey chemical supply com-

pany, the FBI said. The amount is less than one-one-hundredth of an ounce.

"It's an unusual amount," said FBI Special Agent Robert Holley, head of the Chicago office's counterterrorism Joint Terrorism Task Force. "That's a lot. It doesn't take much to kill."

Authorities said Bachner posed

HOW TOXIN KILLS

Tetrodotoxin, a nerve toxin that can be derived from pufferfish and other marine life, can be lethal even in small doses. One milligram can kill if injected. Eating a pufferfish can also be lethal. Death usually occurs in 4 to 6 hours.

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as Dr. Edmond Backer to buy the toxin over the Internet. They would not say what they thought his motive was, but FBI agents said it did not appear to be terrorism-related.

The FBI said in a statement that all of the toxin was recovered and the public was in no danger.

Bachner, who friends said is a financial planner and co-owner of a small technology company in Oakbrook Terrace, was formally charged late Monday afternoon and ordered held without bail during a federal court appearance in Rockford.

But in a highly unusual move, prosecutors did not publicly release the entire criminal complaint filed in the case.

Possessing the toxin, commonly known as TTX, without the proper federal approval is a felony.

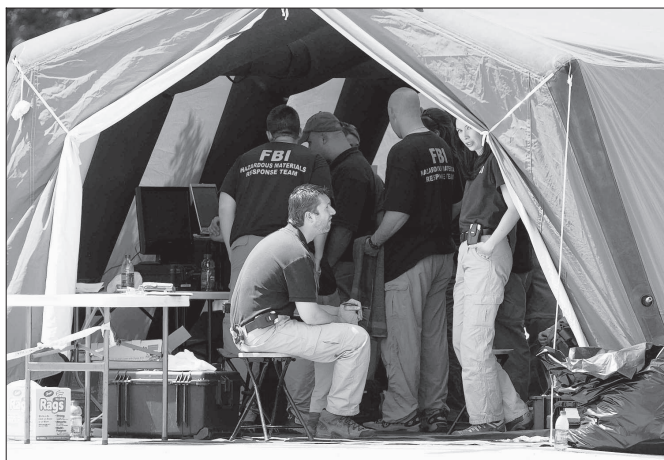
Tetrodotoxin—a nerve toxin isolated from pufferfish or made synthetically—is typically used by researchers at universities or pharmaceutical companies.

The chemical is applied to isolate the effects of a particular drug on a cell by eliminating nerve signals that would interfere with scientists' observations, said Robert Zucker, professor of neuroscience at the University of California, Berkeley.

The 98 milligrams allegedly ordered by Bachner would be "about enough to kill 98 people" if injected, Zucker said.

"There's probably no legitimate research purpose for having that much on hand," Zucker said, adding that he has only 1 milligram in his lab. Marine organisms such as pufferfish produce particularly strong poisons that remain lethal when diluted in seawater.

Authorities were alerted to Bachner's alleged purchase of the TTX when an employee at the New Jersey



Tribune photo by Jim Prisching

FBI agents and Lake in the Hills police set up a command center outside a Lake in the Hills home on Monday.

chemical supply company contacted the FBI's Newark office. Agents from that office then contacted Chicago FBI officials, said FBI Special Agent Jane Rhodes, an agency spokeswoman.

Authorities said that when agents determined there was no Dr. Edmond Backer and found out the company Bachner claimed to represent, EB Strategic Research, did not exist, they set up a "controlled buy" in Algonquin.

About a half-hour after Bachner's arrest, agents began searching his two-story, single-family home in the 5700 block of McKenzie Drive in Lake in the Hills, Holley said.

Neighbors in the quiet subdivision watched Monday afternoon as agents wearing biohazard suits carried items outside. The items, some appearing to be stacks of paper in thick plastic bags, were placed in an inflatable container resembling a child's wading pool and hosed down.

An FBI hazardous materials team was on site, as well as local fire equipment, but Holley said the neighborhood was not in any danger and no evacuations were necessary.

Neighbors who know Bachner and his wife said they were taken aback.

Jeff Block, who lives down

the block, said Bachner moved into the neighborhood about five years ago.

"He is a great guy. I was extremely shocked when the FBI showed up at my door this morning and started asking questions about him," said Block, who described himself as good friend of Bachner.

Three or four men from the neighborhood were supposed to get together at Block's house Sunday to play video games, but Bachner begged off, Block said.

"He was going to be there, but he wasn't there," Block said. "He wasn't feeling good. He had allergies or something."

Residents of Bachner's street said agents questioned them about the Bachner family.

"They asked if we'd seen delivery people coming to the house, and how many deliveries," said Sarah Awe, 36, who lives across the street.

She said she had not noticed anything unusual.

If convicted, Bachner could face up to 10 years in prison, according to the FBI.

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