



## **Nashville police investigating 'intentional' Christmas vehicle explosion**

*Erin Einhorn, Doha Madani & Rima Abdelkader*

*Local and federal authorities are investigating the explosion of a recreational vehicle that broadcast a warning to residents before it blew up in downtown Nashville early Friday.*

*The explosion, which police called an "intentional act," shattered the Christmas morning quiet in the center of the city's business district around 6:30 a.m. CT.*

*Tissue was found following the blast, and authorities are examining to confirm whether it could be human remains, according to Metropolitan Nashville Police John Drake. He added that there were otherwise no known fatalities from the blast, and authorities had no advance warning in the days prior that the explosion was imminent.*

*Three people received non-critical injuries, bricks toppled from buildings blocks away, trees were knocked to the ground, and streets had the charred look of a battleground.*

*The damage to an AT&T building next to the RV disrupted 911 emergency services and temporarily grounded planes at Nashville International Airport.*

*According to police, officers arrived at the scene before the explosion, responding to reports of shots fired around 5:30 a.m. and found an RV parked in front of the AT&T building. A speaker system on the RV was broadcasting a warning about an imminent explosion and telling people to evacuate through what sounded like a recorded female voice.*

*"They heard the announcements coming from this vehicle, took them seriously and were working to seal the streets to protect folks," said Metropolitan Nashville Police spokesman Don Aaron. "We think lives were saved by those officers doing just that."*

*The explosion was so powerful it knocked one of the officers to the ground, prompting police to bring in counselors. "They went through a very traumatic experience," Aaron said.*

*Officials said they had no sense of the motive of the predawn bomb in a largely deserted area after warning people to stay away. The explosion disrupted AT&T service around Nashville, because of the proximity of the blast to the building, company spokesman Jim Greer said in an emailed statement.*

*"We are in contact with law enforcement and working as quickly and safely as possible to restore service," Greer said.*

*Local news stations reported that 911 service was out in surrounding communities. On Friday afternoon, the Federal Aviation Administration temporarily grounded flights out of Nashville International Airport, citing telecommunication issues related to the blast.*

*Smoke and fire could be seen from the area for hours after the explosion, just across the Cumberland River from the Tennessee Titans' Nissan Stadium and half a mile from the state Capitol.*



*Provided by NBC News Image: Nashville explosion (Andrew Nelles / Reuters)*

*Officials said three people were taken to local hospitals with non-critical injuries. Officials said they weren't sure if anybody had been inside the RV when it blew up. Though police dogs were sniffing for other explosive materials in the area, officials said they did not believe there were other bombs planted.*

*"There are a lot of moving parts," said Fire Chief William Swann.*

*Matt Foster, an assistant special agent in charge with the FBI, the agency leading the investigation, said authorities are combing through what he called a "massive crime scene" and aren't sure who was behind the explosion.*

*He called on local residents to reach out to the FBI with information.*

*"Please tell us what you know," he said. "We need your leads. We need your help."*

*City Councilman Freddie O'Connell, who represents the area, tweeted that "dozens" of his constituents had lost their homes on a frigid holiday morning with snow expected.*

*"We will work together to get through this and rebuild," O'Connell tweeted.*

*One of the residents is Betsy Williams, 64, who runs a vacation rental business in a building her family owns across the street from where the RV was parked.*

*She was sleeping in her third-floor apartment on 2nd Avenue North when she was awakened by the sound of gunfire around 4:30 or 5 a.m., she said. "It sounded like it was from an automatic weapon because it was rapid fire," she said, adding that she heard several loud bursts of gunfire, prompting her to call 911.*

*Williams' son, who was visiting from Georgia for the holiday and staying in one of the vacation units, noticed the RV parked across the street and thought it seemed suspicious, she said.*

*Then she heard a voice coming from the vehicle warning that it was about to explode. "It was, 'Evacuate now. This vehicle has a bomb. This vehicle will explode,'" she said.*

*When the message changed to a countdown, warning that the vehicle would explode in 15 minutes, then 14 minutes, she woke up her 85-year-old sister, who lives in Arizona but was visiting for the holiday, staying in another apartment. She put her cat, Mavis, into a carrier and she and her family got on the elevator around the time the message was giving an 11-minute warning.*

*They ran to her car, which was parked a block away, and drove across the river to watch from a distance. When nothing happened after 15 or 20 minutes, they started driving back home, she said. That's when they saw the explosion.*

*"A fireball went up above the AT&T building," she said. "It was a hellacious blast. It was just a big old boom and it blew out the front of those buildings and caused a crater in the street."*

*Williams and her family are now staying in a hotel with just the clothes they were wearing when they evacuated, unable to buy a change of clothes since the police have the downtown area shut down.*

*"I said I wanted to spend Christmas day in my pajamas all day long but I didn't really mean that," she joked.*

*She's not sure when she'll be able to get back home, or if anything will be left. "It's terrible," she said. "All of my stuff. All of our Christmas presents. We had all of our stuff laid out, ready to have Christmas stockings and Christmas breakfast and open our gifts and spend all day having a really nice, relaxed Christmas, sipping on a little champagne, and now we're not doing any of that."*

*Still, she said, she's grateful that whoever planted the bomb issued the evacuation warning, enabling her family to escape with their lives.*

*"Thank God for that," she said.*

*Williams' spouse Kim Madlom, said they first called 911 about 5:30 a.m. after hearing what sounded like gunshots. About half an hour later, Madlom began to hear audio alerting them to the bomb.*

*"We went all the way down to our basement area and went out the back door on First Avenue because we were afraid to get on Second Avenue," Madlom said. "Because we*

*also were concerned that we heard gunshots that, you know, we might be, somebody might be trying to lure us out." Madlom believes whoever set off the bomb had given residents a "grace period" in case they didn't leave before the 15-minute warning was over.*

*"I do want to say in retrospect, we've talked about it, we feel like those gunshots were a recording as well. Not actual gunshots," Madlom said. "I mean, we feel like it was a recording because there was the sound the pattern to it. By the third time we heard it was exactly the same."*

*Photos posted to social media by the city's fire department showed broken windows, damaged trees and extensive property damage along a stretch of 2nd Avenue North in Nashville. Local TV stations showed footage of walls blown off of buildings.*

*Nashville Mayor John Cooper said the explosion had destroyed water mains, exacerbating the "drama" at the scene. He estimated that at least 41 separate businesses had been damaged.*

*"I want to stand with our downtown residents and our business owners, for whom this was a terrible day," Cooper said Friday evening.*

*"Nashville has faced other challenges, particularly this year — we can rebuild and and get back to normal."*

*The mayor noted that the damage would have been far worse on a weekday. The typically busy downtown street was fairly sleepy Friday in the early hours of Christmas, Cooper said.*

*"It would be a different message if it were 5 p.m. on a Friday," he told reporters at the scene.*

*Cooper issued a civil state of emergency Friday, which imposed a 4:30 p.m. curfew in the area that would go through until Sunday. The mayor also said he was working with Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee to coordinate state and federal resources for the city as the aftermath of the explosion continues for locals.*

*"I think the message of today is we have gone from relief, now to resolve to catch those folks and to rebuild our city," Cooper said. "And one more challenge in Nashville's 2020 but we will get through it."*

*A local newspaper reported that the blast from the explosion could be heard and felt from miles away.*

*Tom Cirillo, 37, said the deafening blast rattled his condo a half-mile away.*

*"It was a very, very loud sound and was shaking what seemed like the foundation of the building for three or four seconds," said Cirillo, who teaches in a Nashville private school.*

*The explosion was "surreal," he said in an interview. "You hear about these things in other countries or other places but to think that in Nashville, Tennessee in 2020, there's going to be a car bomb go off not far from where you live is somewhat*

*unbelievable.", he noted "Nashville is a big city but it's not New York or Los Angeles or D.C."*

*The area around the blast is mainly home to offices, restaurants and stores but local residents live in apartments and condos that have been renovated in recent years on the upper floors of buildings in the charming stretch of downtown, which is popular with tourists.*

*The city's bomb squad was on the scene after the explosion, along with agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.*

*The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation tweeted that it has agents and dogs trained to detect accelerators at the scene to assist in the investigation, which is being led by the FBI.*

*A White House spokesman said President Donald Trump had been briefed on the explosion and would be receiving regular updates.*

*A spokesman for the U.S. Justice Department said Acting Attorney General Jeff Rosen had made all department resources available to assist in the investigation.*

## **The Guardian**

### ***Nashville: FBI combs wreckage as mystery surrounds Christmas Day blast***

*Guardian staff*

*Mystery surrounds the motivation behind the detonation of an apparent bomb on the streets of downtown Nashville that rocked Tennessee's biggest city on Christmas morning as investigators continued to comb the wreckage for clues.*



*Provided by The Guardian Photograph: Thaddaeus McAdams/Getty Images*

*Three people were lightly injured in the blast and some possible human remains have been found near the site of the RV that exploded and caused serious damage to Nashville's historic core. But it is not clear if or how the remains are linked to the incident.*

***What is certain is the bizarre nature of the attack.***

*Police were responding to an early morning report of shots fired when they encountered the RV blaring a recorded warning that a bomb would detonate in 15 minutes, Metro Nashville police chief John Drake said. Police evacuated nearby buildings and called in the bomb squad. The RV exploded shortly afterward.*

***FBI and first responders work downtown in Nashville on Christmas Day.***

*Police believe the blast was intentional but don't yet know a motive or target, and Drake noted that officials had not received any threats before the explosion.*

*The chief said investigators at the scene "have found tissue that we believe could be remains, but we'll have that examined and let you know at that time." Police could not say whether it potentially came from someone inside the RV.*

*Three people taken to area hospitals for treatment were in stable condition Friday evening, Nashville mayor John Cooper said.*

*"This morning's attack on our community was intended to create chaos and fear in this season of peace and hope. But Nashvillians have proven time and time again that the spirit of our city cannot be broken," Cooper said at a news conference after issuing a curfew for the area.*

*The blast sent black smoke and flames billowing from the heart of downtown Nashville's tourist scene, an area packed with honky-tonks, restaurants and shops. Buildings shook and windows shattered streets away from the explosion near a building owned by AT&T that lies one block from the company's office tower, a landmark in downtown.*

*On Saturday morning teams of experts were still collecting debris from a wide area of the blast site. The damage to the AT&T building has prompted some speculation that it was the target of the attack.*

*"We do not know if that was a coincidence, or if that was the intention," police spokesman Don Aaron said. He said earlier that some people were taken to the department's central precinct for questioning but declined to give details.*

*AT&T said the affected building is the central office of a telephone exchange, with network equipment in it. The blast interrupted service, but the company declined to say how widespread outages were.*

*The AT&T outages site showed service issues in middle Tennessee and Kentucky. Several police agencies reported that their 911 systems were down because of the*

*outage, including Knox County, home to Knoxville about 180 miles (290km) east of Nashville.*

*AT&T said that it was bringing in portable cell sites and was working with law enforcement to get access to make repairs to its equipment. The company noted that “power is essential to restoring” service.*

*The Federal Aviation Administration temporarily halted flights out of Nashville airport because of telecommunications issues associated with the explosion.*

*The FBI will be taking the lead in the investigation, agency spokesman Joel Siskovic said. Federal investigators from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives were also on the scene.*

*The FBI is the primary law enforcement agency responsible for investigating federal crimes, such as explosives violations and acts of terrorism.*

### ***Police search for clues to mysterious motor home blast in Nashville***

*Tim Ghianni*



*A vehicle burns near the site of an explosion in the area of Second and Commerce in Nashville*

*NASHVILLE, Tenn. (Reuters) - Police and federal agents in Nashville sought clues on Saturday to determine how and why a motor home was blown to pieces in an apparent bombing on Christmas Day that injured three people and damaged dozens of buildings in the heart of America's country music capital.*

*The motor home, parked on a downtown street of Tennessee's largest city, exploded at dawn on Friday moments after police responding to reports of gunfire in the area noticed the recreational vehicle and heard an automated message emanating from it warning of a bomb.*

*The means of detonation and whether anyone was inside the RV when it blew up were not immediately known, but investigators were examining what they believed might be human remains found in the vicinity of the blast, police said.*

*Police offered no possible motive, and there was no claim of responsibility, though Nashville Metropolitan Police Department officials called the blast an "intentional act" and vowed to determine its origin.*

*Agents of the FBI and the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives were assisting in the probe.*

*Adding to the cryptic nature of the incident was the eerie preamble described by witnesses - a crackle of gunfire followed an apparently computer-generated female voice from the RV reciting a minute-by-minute countdown to an impending bombing.*

*Police scrambled to evacuate nearby homes and buildings and called for a bomb squad, which was still en route to the scene when the RV blew up just outside an AT&T building where it had been parked.*

*Police later posted a photo of the motor home, which they said had arrived in the area about four hours prior to the explosion.*

*The fiery blast, heard for miles away, destroyed a number of other vehicles parked nearby, shattered windows and heavily damaged several adjacent buildings. Mayor John Cooper said a total of 41 businesses were damaged.*

*Fire officials said three people were taken to hospitals with relatively minor injuries and were listed in stable condition. Authorities said quick action by police to clear the area of bystanders likely prevented more casualties.*

*Damage to AT&T facilities from the blast caused widespread disruptions of telephone, internet and fiber optic TV service in central Tennessee and parts of several neighboring states, including Mississippi, Kentucky, Alabama and Georgia, the company said.*

*Police Chief John Drake said authorities had received no threats of an attack prior to the reports of gunfire at the outset of the incident.*

*The explosion occurred about two blocks from Lower Broadway, where some of Nashville's famous live music venues are located.*

*The Ryman Auditorium, former home of the Grand Ole Opry and just three blocks from the blast scene, was undamaged.*

*The Gaylord Opryland and current Grand Ole Opry complexes, which sit outside the downtown area, were not impacted.*

*"It's a startling thing to have it happen in Nashville so close, and on Christmas, but we understand that America is in very tumultuous times right now," country singer John Rich, who owns a honky-tonk club a block from the explosion, told Reuters.*

*(Reporting by Tim Ghianni in Nashville; Additional reporting by Rich McKay in Atlanta and Katanga Johnson and Lucia Mutikani in Washington; Writing by Steve Gorman; Editing by Daniel Wallis)*