



Hoax Threats to Utah Schools

May 2023



Executive Summary

The speed, diversity, and global access of communications technologies have outpaced the capabilities of law enforcement to enforce certain types of criminal activity, while also highlighting diplomatic barriers. We assess the state of Utah will continue to see hoax threat calls at increased frequency, with limited ability to identify, arrest, and prosecute offenders; however, mitigation opportunities exist that may lessen the impact to critical infrastructure and the public.



Potential Motivations

- Grievance (Personal or Socio-political)
- Avoiding responsibilities at school or work
- Social media clout, immaturity, and/or perception of humor
- Swatting Services (Purchased Threats)
- Diversion for other criminal activity
- Financial impact to government operations



Negative Impacts of Hoax Threats

- Financial and resource impacts to responding agencies and organizations (Law Enforcement, Fire, Medical, Healthcare, etc.)
- Crisis fatigue, complacency, and “cry wolf” mentality among responders and the general public
- Mental health and trauma to students, community, and responders
- Unseen (scheduled healthcare, personal activities, events, etc.)



Technology

Anonymous communication through advancing technology as well as traditionally available means

- Free Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) numbers
- Virtual Private Networks (VPN)
- Use of multiple routers (including hacking)
- Artificial Intelligence
- Service providers focused on anonymity
- Foreign service providers without U.S. legal obligation
- Others



Identifying Hoax Threats - “Red Flags”

- Hoax calls are often the only call received, where real incidents would typically result in multiple calls.
- Hoax calls are received on non-emergency lines.
- Caller’s demeanor is inconsistent with the alleged incident
- Background noise is inconsistent with the alleged incident (typing, fake gunshots, etc.)
- Mispronounced names of cities, streets, buildings, etc.
- Story changes when confronted, or asked follow-up questions.
- “Call of Duty Speak” - Caller uses exotic or specific names of weapons from video games



Utah Trends and Reporting

- Majority of hoax threats directed toward Utah schools are related to social media trends and the swarm of hoax threats on 29 March 2023.
- Non-emergency hoax incidents that require investigative, rather than emergency response also exist. These include emails, letters, and social media posts.
- Social media images and screenshots are often recycled and altered with the names of other schools

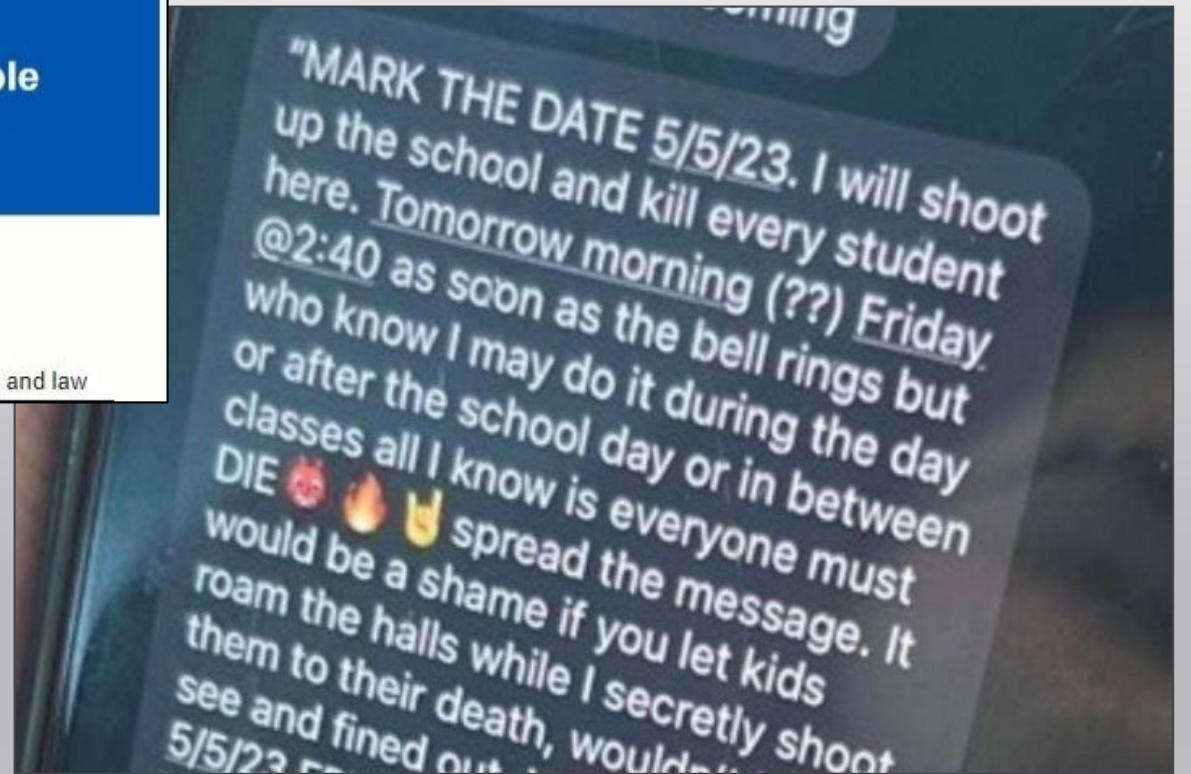


New alert !

(U//FOUO) Non-Specific School Threat Impacting Multiple States

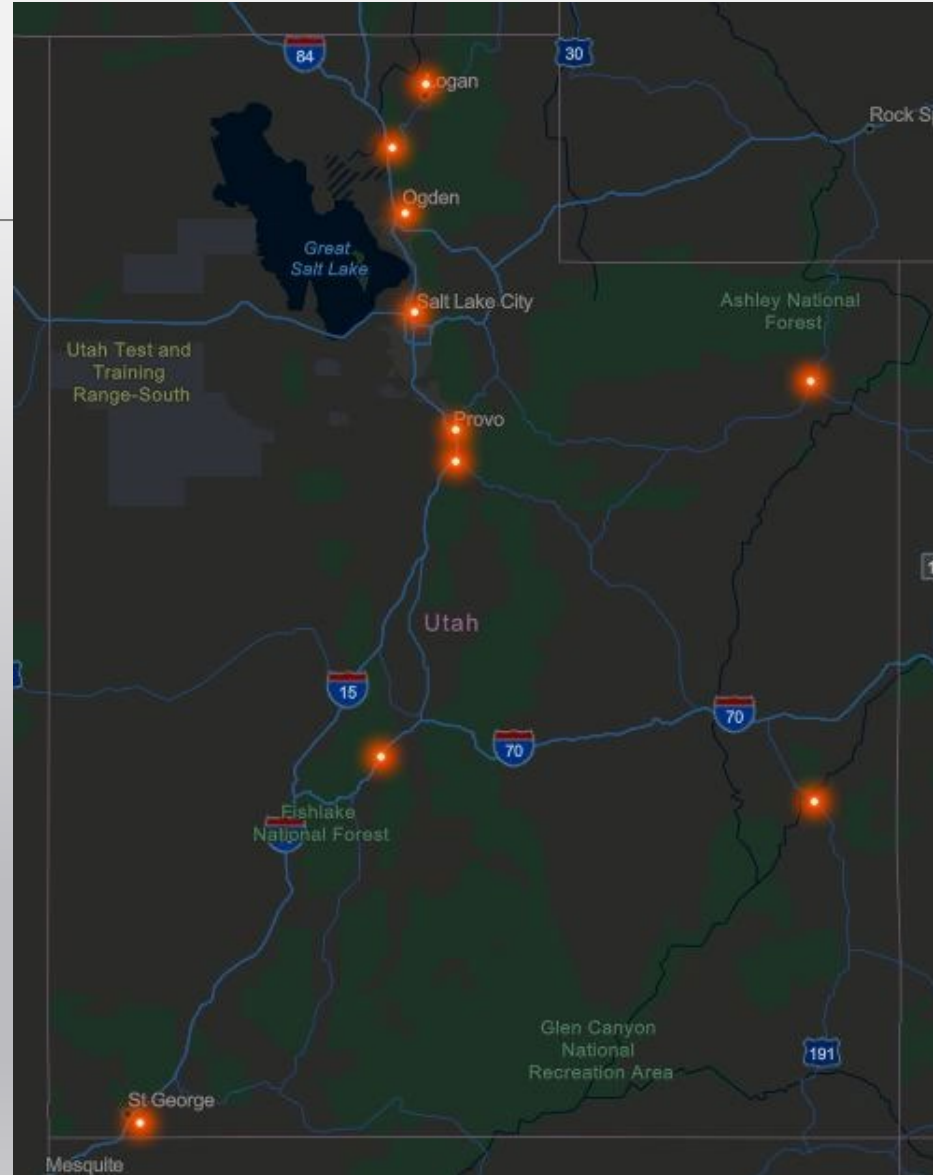
(U//FOUO) Non-Specific School Threat Impacting Multiple States

(U//FOUO) The Utah Statewide Information and Analysis Center (SIAC) is aware of multiple Utah school districts and law





March 29th Incidents





Call Script

- Phone called in on an administrative or “non-emergency” phone line to the local law enforcement agency.
- Caller was an adult male with thick accent.
- Caller claimed to be in a school bathroom.
- Claimed the shooter was a student with a weapon.
- Heavy breathing and panting, likely to sound panicked.
- Disconnects call when unable to answer questions or when confronted.



March 29th Swatting Calls in Utah

09:17AM - Cache County

09:27AM - Box Elder County

09:30AM - Weber County

09:37AM - Salt Lake County

09:45AM - Utah County

09:54AM - Utah County

09:57AM - Washington County

11:11AM - Washington County

11:23AM - Grand County

11:32AM - Sevier County

11:45AM - Uintah County

09:57
SIAC notified by a
dispatch center

10:23
Alert sent

12:00
Request For
Information Sent



Current Information

FBI maintains lead investigative responsibility.

Suspect called through free (VoIP) numbers available through open sources, utilized VPNs, and hacked an unsecure U.S. routers.

Despite sophisticated attempts to remain anonymous, the FBI has determined the originating source.



Possible Mitigation Methods

- Intervention within the Communications Sector to prevent misuse of exploited technology
- Information sharing with local, state, and federal law enforcement and public safety partners
- Implementation of sensors and alert technologies to support response and threat verification
- Recovery and crisis response plans
- Resources for public safety dispatch centers to evaluate phone numbers
- Training and implementation of School Safety Specialists (H.B. 61)



Questions?