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Anti-Abortion Threats Up Since Sept. 11

- By ABC News

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Bulletproof glass, reinforced concrete, protective gear for opening the mail — it sounds like the new era of enhanced security post-Sept. 11. But one group of Americans has been living with such measures for years: doctors who legally provide abortions.

Abortion providers have been the target of shootings, bombings and vandalism in the past, and have learned to live with regular threats of violence. But they have reported an increase in the threats since the Sept. 11 terror attacks — including two waves of mailings purporting to contain anthrax.

Last Thursday, about 200 abortion clinics and advocacy groups received Federal Express packages containing a white powder and a letter saying the powder was anthrax.

"Enclosed is anthrax, the real thing, very high quality," read a letter received by **Dr. Morris Wortman**, an obstetrician-gynecologist who performs abortions as part of his practice in Rochester, N.Y.

The letter, like many of the others, was signed "The Army of God" — the name of a militant anti-abortion group whose members have carried out attacks on abortion providers since the mid-1980s. None of the letters turned out to contain real anthrax.

The FBI is looking into a claim that the letters were sent by Clayton Waagner, a fugitive anti-abortion militant with ties to the Army of God. Waagner, 44, has been on the run since February, when he escaped from an Illinois jail where he was awaiting sentencing on federal weapons charges.

At his trial, Waagner testified that God had asked him to kill doctors who provide abortions. In a posting on the Army of God Web site in June, a writer claiming to be Waagner said he knew where 42 abortion providers lived and threatened to kill them.

On the day after Thanksgiving, another anti-abortion militant, Neal Horsley, posted a message on the site saying that Waagner had visited him and told him he had sent the hoax anthrax mailings.

Abortion providers had reported a similar wave of hoax anthrax mailings in October. Waagner has been on the FBI's 10 Most Wanted Fugitives list since September.

An Underground Army

The Army of God praises anti-abortion militants who have committed violence against abortion providers, including Paul Hill, a Presbyterian minister on death row in Florida for killing two abortion clinic workers in Pensacola, Fla., in 1993, and James Kopp, who is in a French jail pending extradition to face charges in the 1998 shooting death of Buffalo, N.Y., doctor Barnett Slepian.

Eric Rudolph, the fugitive wanted in connection with the 1996 Olympic Park bombing, is also suspected of involvement in two bombings in Atlanta for which the Army of God claimed responsibility.

Anti-abortion militants who carry out violent attacks remain underground because their activities are illegal. But the Army of God does have a public face: the Rev. Donald Spitz, an ordained Pentecostal minister who runs the group's Web site from his home in Chesapeake, Va.

Spitz openly supports the killing of abortion providers as a way of saving what he calls unborn children from abortion. "If I had to choose between live babies and live abortionists, I'd choose live babies," he told ABCNEWS.

However, he denies that such statements amount to threats, and is careful not to make it appear that they are calls to action: "I'm not saying I would murder that abortionist ... I'm saying I prefer live babies to live abortionists."

Spitz said he has no knowledge of who sent the recent letters to abortion clinics, but applauds whoever did, saying the letters helped to stop some abortions from taking place.

"I consider the person who did send those letters to be a hero, that he did a great thing. He did a wonderful thing. He saved the lives of many, many innocent children."

Like some others on the far-right Christian fringe, Spitz attributes the Sept. 11 attacks to God's anger at the United States for permitting "sins" like abortion. "God's going to destroy this nation because of this one sin, and other sins," he said. "What happened at the World Trade Center is only a sign of the beginning of God's wrath."

Fighting a 'Holy War'

In the June posting to the Army of God site, the writer claiming to be Waagner described himself as a "terrorist to the abortionist."

Terrorism experts have also drawn a parallel between militant anti-abortion groups like the Army of God and international terror organizations like Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda.

"They both have a violent religious vision opposed to the government of the United States, and are going to use all means necessary to carry it out," said Fred Clarkson, who has studied domestic terrorism for 20 years. "It absolutely is a holy war, and they believe they're doing God's will."

Living in Fear

Doctors who choose to provide abortions have learned to take extensive precautions against attacks from anti-abortion groups.

Wortman's practice in Rochester is protected by steel-reinforced concrete, bulletproof windows and a network of cameras that provide 24-hour surveillance. He owns a handgun with a laser sight, but draws the line at wearing a bulletproof vest. Wortman estimates he has spent \$100,000 on security measures.

As well as bombs and shootings, Wortman is wary of the mail. He has been receiving hoax anthrax letters since 1999. The threats, like the recent one, all turned out to be fake, but his wife Rebecca, who is also his office manager, nevertheless takes precautions. She takes the mail into a room cut off from the rest of the practice, then puts on gloves and a mask, and opens the letters with a Ziploc bag on hand in case any of them turns out to contain suspicious powder.

Although no abortion clinics are known to have received real anthrax in the mail, Wortman says the letters are intimidating. "What really goes through your mind is this: somebody really hates me, hates me enough to send the very best," he said.

But Wortman says he will not change the way he practices medicine. "These domestic terrorists who go by the name of Army of God serve only to strengthen my resolve and that of our staff," he said at a news conference after receiving the letter.