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California college accuses Kennewick man of threats

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KENNEWICK — A 51-year-old Kennewick man is accused of using an online classified ads site to blast his former colleagues at University of California Santa Barbara and threatening an attack on the campus.

Neil P. Baker was arrested Monday on suspicion of making a bomb threat with intent to alarm and a misdemeanor harassment charge and is being held in the Benton County jail.

Formal charges have not been filed.

His arrest came three days after an Alabama college professor shot and killed three colleagues during a meeting, and Kennewick police say Baker had the potential to commit a similar crime at UCSB.

Kennewick police started investigating Baker about four months ago after the UCSB police chief contacted them with concerns about Baker's threatening Craigslist postings. Baker apparently also had been e-mailing administrators and staff at the school over the years.

"We didn't know anything about him. ... At the time, I thought it was just a guy PO'd at them," said Kennewick police Detective Sgt. Jack Simington. "But he obviously has an ax to grind with them. ... He's a very vindictive man."

Baker apparently has a vendetta against the California school where he worked for four years as an engineer in the nonfabrication lab. After being forced to resign or be fired in 2004, he moved to the Tri-Cities, though it's unclear what brought him to the area.

Police say he hasn't worked while he's been in the Tri-Cities, and Baker claims he's "permanently unemployable" because UCSB officials have sabotaged his reputation. He calls the school the "criminal Mafia."

Baker knows the law and gets close to violating it without crossing over the line, police say.

"He's very intelligent and has a way of wording things so there are no threats (if taken individually), but if you're reading the whole story, it's

clear," said Detective John Davis.

For example, he once had an issue with one of his neighbors in Kennewick and took his rifle out to his front yard and started dismantling it. He never pointed the gun at anyone or threatened anyone with it, but it was clear he was intimidating them and letting them know he had a gun, Simington said.

Kennewick detectives contacted Baker, secured a vintage rifle that he has and talked to him about the concerns his Craigslist postings were creating. Those posts weren't illegal, Simington said, and Baker hadn't committed a crime, so he eventually got his rifle back.

Everything Kennewick police discussed with Baker ended up on Craigslist and his postings and alleged threats started escalating, Simington said.

Baker posted on Feb. 5 a fictitious news story that he wrote about a mass suicide at UCSB where 13,000 faculty, staff and students killed themselves because of his rants and how he was arrested by Department of Homeland Security agents.

He said in a Feb 8 post that he'd be in Santa Barbara in a couple of weeks.

And a Friday post showed Baker with a picture of himself wearing a mask and holding a rifle.

UCSB police put out an alert about Baker on Feb. 11, advising people to call police if he were seen on campus. They said he was a person of interest to the department "because of recent non-specific threats that may pertain to current UCSB employees."

The alert was updated Tuesday, after authorities learned he'd been arrested in Kennewick.

Kennewick detectives, who had been watching Baker and knew he took a walk every day, waited until he left his Garfield Street house to arrest him, Simington said.

When they searched his home, they found writings that said he believes he's the antichrist and would do a better job as president than President Obama, Simington said.

They also seized some books they found: anarchist cookbooks, books about the chemistry of powder and explosives and component explosive and a technical manual from the Army about incendiaries. Baker also had the book *Going Postal*, which profiles school and workplace shootings, and *The Art of Getting Even*, a book about do-it-yourself justice.

"We're not out to just put this guy in jail, but he creates a risk to the public ... and he's attracted our attention," Simington said. "You look at what has happened and occurred on the East Coast with the most recent shooting. We obviously don't want to have anything like that occur here."

In a Craigslist editorial posted Friday, Baker contends university officials were trying to destroy him and refers to their actions as "attempted murder," reportedly because they've made him unhireable.

His editorial was titled "Does it seem like UCSB is trying to incite Neil to shoot?" and included posters he apparently made with pictures of other university school shooters from Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University that said, "Remember that kid you bullied in school? It's too late to say you're sorry."

He also made a similar poster with his picture that read, "Remember that coworker you mobbed at UCSB? It's not too late to say you're sorry."

In November, Baker commented on a story that the Daily Sound newspaper ran about the new UCSB police chief and once again railed against the school's faculty and supervisors. He said they prevented him from getting a job at Yale.

"I was so angry that I could have killed them all and burned every building to the ground. I'm no high school kid, deranged Army psychiatrist or English major with a couple of handguns; I'm a veteran engineer and a very creative one," Baker allegedly wrote in the November post. "It would have taken military air strikes to stop me ... UCSB would be history."

In 2007, college officials temporarily locked down the engineering building where Baker used to work after he allegedly posted comments on Craigslist about the one-year anniversary of a shooting at a U.S. Post Office, where an employee shot and killed six coworkers.

The shooting spree was at a Goleta, Calif., post office, which is where Baker previously had lived while at UCSB. The university's newspaper, the Daily Nexus, reported Baker talked about how he was thinking about killing his former bosses and co-workers at the time of the postal shooting.

"I think about it every day. I've thought about it every day for a couple of years. I still think about it. They deserve it. And I can kill a hell of a lot more than six," Baker wrote in a Craigslist post, according to the newspaper.

Kennewick police have notified Crisis Response about Baker and they're continuing to investigate. Davis said he's also talking to the FBI about possibly getting him put on the domestic terrorist list and has asked local aircraft companies to call him if someone charts a plane to Santa Barbara.

"We just believe it's in the public's best interest to address these issues," Simington said.

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