

October 5, 2018

Twitter ([https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?text=Hoax%20Threats%20are%20Crimes&url=https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/hoax-threats-awareness-100518)

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[100518&t=Hoax%20Threats%20are%20Crimes](https://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/hoax-threats-awareness-100518&t=Hoax%20Threats%20are%20Crimes)) Email (mailto:?)

[Subject=%22Hoax%20Threats%20are%20Crimes%22&body=https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/hoax-threats-awareness-100518](mailto:?Subject=%22Hoax%20Threats%20are%20Crimes%22&body=https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/hoax-threats-awareness-100518))

Note: This is an updated version of a story that was originally posted on May 23, 2018. As the new school year begins, the FBI is reminding students that making a hoax threat against a school or other public place is a serious federal crime.

Think Before You Post

Hoax Threats are Serious Federal Crimes



(<https://www.fbi.gov/image-repository/think-before-you-post-hoax-threats-graphic-052318.jpg>)

In the aftermath of tragic shootings, such as the ones at Santa Fe High School in Texas and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida, there is often an increase in hoax threats to schools and other public places. Safety is paramount, and the FBI and our state and local law enforcement partners always respond to each threat.

In recent months, the FBI and law enforcement around the country have investigated a number of hoax threats of targeted violence against schools and other public places. These threats—often issued via text message or posted on social media—are taken very seriously. Hoax threats are not a joke, and they can have devastating consequences—both for the public and for the perpetrators.

Issuing a threat—even over social media, via text message, or through e-mail—is a federal crime (threatening interstate communications). Those who post or send these threats can receive up to five years in federal prison, or they can face state or local charges.

With a thoughtless remark on social media, young people risk starting out their adult lives in prison and forever being labeled a felon.

“The Bureau and its law enforcement partners take each threat seriously. We investigate and fully analyze each threat to determine its credibility,” said FBI Deputy Director David Bowdich. “Hoax threats disrupt school, waste limited law enforcement resources, and put first responders in unnecessary danger. We also don’t want to see a young person start out adulthood with a felony record over an impulsive social media post. It’s not a joke; always think before you post.”

In addition to consequences for individuals who issue threats, there is also a significant societal cost. Law enforcement agencies have limited resources, and responding to hoax threats diverts officers and costs taxpayers. The threats can also cause severe emotional distress to students, school personnel, and parents.

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David Bowdich, deputy director, FBI

This college student realized the gravity of his threatening post when the FBI arrested him. Transcript | Download
(<https://www.fbi.gov/video-repository/think-before-you-post-psa.mp4/view>)

Here are a few examples of serious threats that the FBI and our partners have investigated:

- Two young men in Kentucky created a social media account in someone else’s name and used it to make threats against a public school (<https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/louisville/news/press-releases/nicholasville-men-sentenced-for-social-media-threats-related-to-school-shooting-hoax>), which police investigated and determined to be a hoax. An 18-year-old was sentenced to 21 months in prison and a 19-year-old was sentenced to 27 months.
- A young man in Texas used social media and a phone to issue threats against schools (<https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/minneapolis/news/press-releases/houston-texas-area-teenager-sentenced-to-more-than-three-years-in-prison-for-swatting-and-making-bomb-threats-to-minnesota-high-school>) in Minnesota. He also called in fake hostage situations, known as “swatting.” He was arrested, pleaded guilty, and was sentenced to more than three years in federal prison. He was 19 at the time of sentencing.
- A 21-year-old South Carolina man was sentenced to one year in federal prison after he sent text messages claiming there was a bomb (<https://www.justice.gov/usao-sc/pr/columbia-man-sentenced-making-hoax-bomb-threat>) in the parking lot of a Veterans Affairs Medical Center in the state.
- An 18-year-old North Carolina man was sentenced to 22 months in federal prison and was ordered to pay restitution after he broadcast himself on the Internet (<https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/indianapolis/press-releases/2011/ip011011.htm>) calling in bomb threats to various public places, including schools, colleges, and FBI offices.

What Should I Do?

- Don't ever post or send any hoax threats online...period.
- If you are a target of an online threat, alert your local law enforcement immediately.
- If you see a threat of violence posted on social media, immediately contact local law enforcement or your local FBI office. Members of the public can always submit a tip to the FBI at tips.fbi.gov (<https://tips.fbi.gov>).
- Notify authorities but don't share or forward the threat until law enforcement has had a chance to investigate—this can spread misinformation and cause panic.
- If you are a parent or family member, know that some young people post these threats online as a cry for attention or as a way to get revenge or exert control. Talk to your child about the proper outlet for their stress or other emotions, and explain the importance of responsible social media use (<https://www.fbi.gov/scams-and-safety/protecting-your-kids>) and the consequences of posting hoax threats.

Resources

- FBI Warns of Posting Hoax Threats to Institutions and Launches Campaign to Educate the Public to #ThinkBeforeYouPost (<https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-warns-of-posting-hoax-threats-to-institutions-and-launches-campaign-to-educate-the-public-to-thinkbeforeyoupost>)
- FBI, This Week: Campaign Addresses Consequences of Hoax Threats (<https://www.fbi.gov/audio-repository/ftw-podcast-hoax-threats-campaign-052318.mp3/view>)
- Inside the FBI: Volunteer Firefighter Sentenced for Making Hoax Bomb Threat (<https://www.fbi.gov/audio-repository/inside-podcast-hoax-threat-case-052318.mp3/view>)
- Gotcha: Volunteer Firefighter Sentenced for Making Hoax Bomb Threat (<https://www.fbi.gov/audio-repository/gotcha-podcast-hoax-threat-case-052318.mp3/view>)
- Desoto County Student Arrested and Denied Bail for Internet Threats (<https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/jackson/news/press-releases/desoto-county-student-arrested-and-denied-bail-for-internet-threats>)
- Two New Mexico Men Facing Federal Charges Arising from Social Media School Shooting Threats (<https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/albuquerque/news/press-releases/two-new-mexico-men-facing-federal-charges-arising-from-social-media-school-shooting-threats>)
- South Bend Man Sentenced to 15 Months' Imprisonment (<https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/indianapolis/news/press-releases/south-bend-man-sentenced-to-15-months-imprisonment>)
- Houston, Texas-Area Teenager Sentenced to More Than Three Years in Prison for Swatting and Making Bomb Threats to Minnesota High School (<https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/minneapolis/news/press-releases/houston-texas-area-teenager-sentenced-to-more-than-three-years-in-prison-for-swatting-and-making-bomb-threats-to-minnesota-high-school>)
- Columbia Man Sentenced for Making Hoax Bomb Threat (<https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/columbia/news/press-releases/columbia-man-sentenced-for-making-hoax-bomb-threat>)
- Nicholasville Men Sentenced for Social Media Threats Related to School Shooting Hoax (<https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices/louisville/news/press-releases/nicholasville-men-sentenced-for-social-media-threats-related-to-school-shooting-hoax>)
- Esta Semana en el FBI: Por Medio de una Campaña se Abordan las Consecuencias de las Amenaza (<https://www.fbi.gov/audio-repository/ftw-podcast-espanol-hoax-threats-campaign-053118.mp3/view>)
- FBI, This Week: Hoax Threats Have Consequences (<https://www.fbi.gov/audio-repository/ftw-podcast-hoax-threats-090618.mp3/view>)

Videos

- Think Before You Post PSA (<https://www.fbi.gov/video-repository/think-before-you-post-psa.mp4/view>)