

SUSPECT ANTHRAX TERRORIST APPARENTLY KILLS SELF

I wonder if the news that the guy the FBI was about to charge as the anthrax terrorist committed suicide will dampen all the fun Patrick Leahy was having yesterday (recall that Leahy was pressuring Mukasey about the anthrax case earlier in July)? The LAT reports that Bruce Ivins, whom the FBI had just informed they were going to charge, apparently killed himself.

A top government scientist who helped the FBI analyze samples from the 2001 anthrax attacks has died in Maryland from an apparent suicide, just as the Justice Department was about to file criminal charges against him for the attacks, the Los Angeles Times has learned.

Bruce E. Ivins, 62, who for the last 18 years worked at the government's elite biodefense research laboratories at Ft. Detrick, Md., had been informed of his impending prosecution, said people familiar with Ivins, his suspicious death and the FBI investigation.

The suspicion on Ivins appears to stem from his efforts to secretly clean up potential contamination in the same time frame as the anthrax letters were sent.

Ivins, employed as a civilian at Ft. Detrick, earlier had attracted the attention of Army officials because of anthrax contaminations that Ivins failed to report for five months. In sworn oral and written statements to an Army investigator, Ivins said that he had erred by keeping the episodes secret — from December 2001 to late April 2002. He said he had swabbed and bleached more

than 20 areas that he suspected were contaminated by a sloppy lab technician.

"In retrospect, although my concern for biosafety was honest and my desire to refrain from crying 'Wolf!' . . . was sincere, I should have notified my supervisor ahead of time of my worries about a possible breach in biocontainment," Ivins told the Army. "I thought that quietly and diligently cleaning the dirty desk area would both eliminate any possible [anthrax] contamination as well as prevent unintended anxiety at the institute."

From the silence of DOJ, I get the feeling we may never have a public accounting of what FBI believes happened (perhaps not surprisingly, since they just had to pay out a chunk of money to Stephen Hatfill because of their earlier blabbing). Even given the appearance that Ivins may have been trying to hide extracurricular work with this strain of anthrax, what of the mention of a technician? Did the FBI think Ivins acted alone or was there really a technician involved as well? And if Ivins sent the anthrax letters, did he do so because he was working on a vaccine and wanted to create the urgency for it? Or was it terrorism motivated by racism or hate?

And then there's the apparent suicide. Yes, according to the LAT report, Ivins was depressed and suicidal (which would have made you think they'd keep a closer watch on him). But if I were a super-skilled biologist, I might go out with a more interesting cocktail than Tylenol and codeine. I just can't help but think of all the suspicious circumstances surrounding David Kelly's "suicide."