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FBI raids **Phila.** home of animal-rights activist

Robert Moran INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

More than a dozen **FBI** agents raided the West **Philadelphia** home of an **animal-rights activist** yesterday in connection with a federal investigation **of** a harassment campaign against an **animal**-testing company.

The focus **of** the raid appeared to be Nick Cooney, 23, a member **of** a group called Hugs for Puppies who has participated in protests against Huntingdon Life Sciences, a testing firm based near Princeton. The company has been the subject **of** an international campaign by **animal-rights** activists who say they want to put it out **of** business.

The campaign includes noisy protests at the homes **of** Huntingdon employees and employees **of** companies that do business with the firm. Some employees have suffered vandalism and threats.

Federal investigators have focused on Stop Huntingdon **Animal** Cruelty USA, which runs a Web site that features anonymous reports describing the protests after they occur. In May, seven alleged members **of** the group were indicted federally in New Jersey and accused **of** organizing the campaign against Huntingdon.

Paul J. Hetznecker, a **Philadelphia** lawyer who has represented Cooney, said the West **Philadelphia** raid was part **of** an intimidation campaign.

"My concern is that the federal government, and in particular this administration, has coordinated a war on lawful dissent," Hetznecker said. "Regardless **of** the evidence, you become a suspect because you are dissenting."

Around 6 a.m. yesterday, the **FBI** agents, including members **of** the Joint Terrorism Task Force, executed a search warrant in the 5000 block **of** Hazel Street, where Cooney rents a room in a three-story house.

The search warrant did not name Cooney, but it sought evidence related to Stop Huntingdon **Animal** Cruelty and Hugs for Puppies. Cooney said he was the only **animal-rights activist** among the eight people living in the house.

"They ransacked my room," said Cooney, who said he was not **home** at the time **of** the raid.

Jason Fults, 29, an environmental **activist** who also lives at the house, said the agents searched every part **of** the building, including the basement and attic, and seized items.

Fults said the agents took his laptop computer.

"I was a little bit scared," said Fults, who insisted he was not active with **animal-rights** causes.

An **FBI** receipt listing the items taken from the house included computers, documents, computer disks, pamphlets and a spray-paint can.

Cooney said his passport was among the documents.

Another name identified on the search warrant was "FCC," which some **animal-rights** activists suggested could refer to Focal Communication Corp., which is headquartered in Chicago.

A spokeswoman for Focal did not respond to requests for comment.

Earlier this year, Focal and its employees, including some in the **Philadelphia** region, were targeted for reportedly having provided telecommunications services to Huntingdon.

The search warrant was approved by a U.S. magistrate in Chicago, and an **FBI** special agent from Chicago led the raid.

"It's part **of** an ongoing federal investigation being coordinated by this office," said Ross Rice, the **FBI's** Chicago spokesman.

He would not elaborate.

Cooney said he had protested outside the homes **of** Focal employees and had received a police citation at one **of** the demonstrations.

He recently pleaded guilty to summary offenses in Chester County resulting from a demonstration outside the **home of** an executive **of** a company that the protesters believed was doing business with Huntingdon.

Cooney is facing a felony charge after allegedly violating a court order by distributing flyers in Cherry Hill that listed the **home** address and phone number **of** Howard Pien, the chief executive **of** Chiron Corp., which has done business with Huntingdon.

Pien lives in Cherry Hill and was the target **of** several demonstrations outside his house in January and February, including one in which protesters drove up and down his street in a truck with video screens showing animals being dissected.

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