

# Federal Agents Warned On Comments to Media

3/20/93

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Two federal law enforcement agencies warned their agents yesterday that "loose and often uninformed comments to the press" are jeopardizing efforts in the World Trade Center bombing and the armed standoff in Waco, Tex.

The joint statement by FBI Director William S. Sessions and Stephen E. Higgins, director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), follows media reports that the agencies have been at odds with each other and with local police.

In New York, unidentified officials have criticized the FBI for the timing of its arrest of bombing suspect Mohammad A. Saleme, rather than waiting for him to lead investigators to other collaborators. Saleme was arrested a day after investigators told Newsday that they had traced what turned out to be his van to a Jersey City rental agency. Newsday says no one asked the paper to withhold that information.

ATF officials also have complained that the FBI took credit for an ATF agent's discovery of a key piece of the destroyed van at the Trade Center. During the same period, law enforcement officials have faulted the

ATF for poor planning in the raid on the Branch Davidians compound in Waco where four agents were shot to death. In their message, Sessions and Higgins said:

"There have been several incidents recently of unnamed agents speaking to the media about aspects of both operations and critical of the other agency. These types of unauthorized and inaccurate comments only serve to undermine the confidence of the American people in our agencies. They also hold the potential for jeopardizing the successful conclusions of both operations."

ATF spokesman John C. Killorin said his agency "felt we were coming under [attack from] unnamed, refused-to-be-identified FBI sources. In pretty tense circumstances, a disagreement often becomes a news story, and these stories of squabbling and dissension tend to get blown out of proportion."

Killorin said agents remain free to speak to reporters but should not offer unsubstantiated opinions.

An FBI official who asked not to be identified agreed that "there was a perception that there was some sniping going on. We just wanted to send a strong message that this is not the best time to be doing this sort of thing."