

# Scavengers blamed in apartment gas explosion

BY DMITRY LOVETSKY  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**ARKHANGELSK, RUSSIA** — Police searched for two homeless scavengers who apparently stole bronze fittings from gas pipes and triggered an explosion at an apartment building Tuesday that killed at least 32 people, authorities said. The blast sheared off a section of the nine-story prefabricated apartment building in this White Sea port about 600 miles north of Moscow. Emergency Situations Ministry spokeswoman Irina Andriyanova said two-dozen people were rescued from the rubble.

Search crews clambered over the wreckage, using power saws to cut through piles of building materials as cranes lifted the biggest beams and panels. The explosion also blew out windows in neighboring buildings. Alexei Kalinin, deputy to the top regional emergency official, said 32 people — including five children — were confirmed dead. Prosecutors opened a criminal investigation. Authorities were searching for two men, said Igor Avtushko, a spokesman for the regional Interior Ministry. The men allegedly were carrying metal pipes and tools, and po-

lice believed they had opened the gas valves in order to steal the bronze fittings that seal them. Avtushko said authorities found fixtures missing in two neighboring buildings but crews were able to fix the gas leaks in time. "These damned vagabonds unscrewed these valves a hundred times in the past, but then it didn't lead to explosions," said Andrei Seleznyov, 52, who lives in a neighboring building. He added that they had been systematically stealing the hardware. Thieves pilfer power lines, municipal facilities and industrial equipment throughout Russia in

search for copper, bronze and other metals to sell for scrap. In addition, neglect of safety precautions has led to frequent gas explosions in Russian apartment buildings and public facilities. Authorities earlier had feared sabotage or terrorism, even though the first emergency crews to respond reported a strong odor of gas. Tension is high in Russia after a series of terrorist attacks blamed on Chechen rebels. In 1999, explosions blamed on rebels ripped through apartment buildings in Moscow and two other cities, killing about 300 people. Tuesday's blast hit at 3:25 a.m. local time, when most residents of

the building were in bed. "We were awakened by a terrible noise," a 40-year-old man who identified himself as Igor and lives in the adjoining section of the apartment building, told Arkhangelsk's Pravda Severa newspaper. "The wall of our bedroom came crashing down on the bed. ... We were in a state of shock." "Through a pillar of dust I saw the street, just our street instead of the wall," he said. He described hearing "heartbreaking cries." Vadim and Anna Kurochkin were awake in their ninth-floor apartment when the blast occurred and they were thrown out

on their sofa, landing safely with no injuries. Their 9-year-old son, Artyom, was on the balcony, which miraculously didn't collapse, and he was rescued by firefighters, Irina Budnik, a spokeswoman for the local fire brigade told Pravda Severa. Building residents had reported smelling gas to the local emergency gas service before the explosion, but that its workers didn't come until the blast occurred, NTV television said. Rescue crews and equipment were dispatched by air from Moscow and northern Karelia to help in the search.

# Investigators continue search for Ohio highway shooting suspect

BY CHRIS STADELMAN  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**COLUMBUS, OHIO** — The man wanted by police in a deadly string of highway sniper attacks has a history of mental illness and is believed to have a semiautomatic pistol and ammunition, authorities said Tuesday. Charles A. McCoy Jr., 28, lived with his mother within miles of where the gunman's bullets killed a passenger, shattered windshields, dented school buses and drilled into homes and a school. "McCoy has had mental health issues in the past and is currently not on medication," the Franklin County Sheriff's Office said in a bulletin released to police departments across the country. "He is believed to have suicidal or homicidal tendencies." Authorities identified McCoy as a suspect Monday and released his picture, vehicle description and license plate. Chief Deputy Steve Martin would not say what evidence led investigators to McCoy, but newspaper and television reports said Tuesday that McCoy's family gave authorities at least one of his guns. The Columbus Dispatch, citing unidentified sources, said a relative contacted police and said

McCoy could be a suspect. It said McCoy's father, Charles Sr., later gave police a 9 mm Beretta handgun, and on Monday it was ballistically matched to some of the bullet fragments recovered in the shootings. The bulletin said McCoy was still believed to have a semiautomatic pistol and ammunition. Martin's office, which is in charge of the investigation, would not release any details about the case Tuesday. Since May, two-dozen sniper shootings have targeted vehicles and buildings around Interstate 270, which circles Columbus, and other highways. Most of the shootings have happened since October; the latest was on Feb. 14. Investigators filed an arrest warrant late Monday for McCoy on a charge of felonious assault in a Dec. 15 shooting that damaged a house. McCoy's parents could not be reached Tuesday. No one answered the door at his home, and a hand-written sign on the door at his father's house a few miles away said, "We do not want to speak to the media." McCoy's mother, Ardith, filed a missing person report with Columbus police on Monday, saying she had not seen her son since Friday.

She said he was upset over a possible move and withdrew \$600 from a bank account, saying he was going to a restaurant-bar known for its array of video games. Neighbors on McCoy's street of tidy, vinyl-sided homes said they didn't know much about the suspect or his mother. "They pretty much stayed in their house when they were home except when he was working in the yard," said Nicole Sewald, 28, who lives across the street. Her 8-year-old son attends Hamilton Central Elementary School, where one of the sniper's bullets struck a window in November. The McCoy's moved there about a year ago, did some repairs and put the house back up for sale, she said. In the three most recent shootings, witnesses described seeing someone aiming at them while standing next to a car. Their descriptions of the suspect and car were similar to information the sheriff's office released Monday. The suspect is 5-foot-8, 185 pounds with brown hair and green eyes, the sheriff's office said Monday. The car is a dark green 1999 Geo Metro with a black hood. From the beginning, Martin had said investigators believe the shooter is familiar with the area

around I-270. Although the last four shootings were on other high-

ways, most of those that occurred through January were within

about a 10-mile stretch of the interstate.

DO YOU HAVE AN  
**EATING DISORDER?**

**WOULD YOU KNOW IT IF YOU DID?**

Every year, thousands of young people—mostly females—struggle with eating disorders. Many are high school or college students. Many don't know what they're dealing with.

Eating disorders include anorexia nervosa and bulimia. They can have serious, long-term health effects and, in some cases, can be fatal.

A weekly education and support group is available for individuals age 14 and older who believe they may have an eating disorder or who have previously been treated for an eating disorder. The group is led by a specially trained nurse or resident.

**Eating Disorders Support Group**  
Wednesdays, 6-7:15 p.m. (excluding the first Wednesday of the month)  
Richland Springs, Eleven Medical Park Dr., Palmetto Health Richland  
To register, call 434-4813

A family support group also is available on the first Wednesday of the month from 6-7:15 p.m. To register, call 434-4813.

**PALMETTO HEALTH**  
BEHAVIORAL CARE  
palmettohealth.com

The Eating Disorders Support Groups are a collaborative effort between Palmetto Health Behavioral Care, USC School of Medicine, Department of Neuropsychiatry, the Department of Mental Health, and SC NAMI (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill).

**March 25th 8pm Koger Center**

**Doors open 7:30pm**

**Tracy Morgan**

from **the Tracy Morgan SNL Show & Premium Blend**

**\$5 Student Tickets w/ID available @ RH Info Desk March 15th**

**\$20 General Public Starting March 22th**

**Get your Student Ticket NOW!**

All tickets are reserved seating. Those who need special assistance call: **777-7500**

general tickets available @ all Capital Ticket outlets starting 3/22

For more information or special assistance call 777-7130 or visit [www.sa.sc.edu/cp](http://www.sa.sc.edu/cp) Event subject to change.

carolina PRODUCTIONS