



The Geocaching Game

By Sgt. Barry D. Denton

Geocaching...have you heard of it? If not, you probably will soon. Geocaching is an international craze that started about 10 years ago.

Simply put, geocaching is a high-tech treasure hunt played throughout the world by adventure seekers equipped with GPS devices. The basic idea of the game is for players to locate hidden outdoor containers which are called caches. The caches are hidden by other players who then place the latitude and longitude of the device into an online database located at the Geocaching website of their region.

The person who initially hides the container encloses an item of some sort of intrinsic value, or a clue to another container. Players then use a GPS device to look for the hidden treasure, and once they find the container they must place a new item inside for future treasure hunters.

So you ask "What does this mean to Bomb Squads?" Well what is unfortunately taking place is that many of the hidden containers look suspicious. The containers can range from military ammunition cans, to PVC pipes, to even Tupperware containers. The caches are usually placed in obscure locations such as local parks, beneath newspaper boxes, inside roadside street light poles, or underneath highway overpasses. Just in the past two years, the Louisville Metro Police Department's Bomb Squad has responded to three cache type containers, each looking suspicious and causing alarm. On each response, nothing on the containers identified the package as part of the geocaching game.

If you consider the time, effort, and money expended for a typical Bomb Squad response, the price tag for each cache response is considerable. As geocaching continues to grow in popularity, the more of an issue it will become. So what can you do to minimize these responses?

Establish a partnership with your local geocaching club. There are many cities in the United States that have them. Take time to meet leaders of the club and explain the issues associated with unmarked containers. Provide them with information on how your team would like caches properly marked, and the areas which might raise concern, such as under bridges or near government installations. By getting to know the club leaders, you not only establish buy-in from the group organizers, but you are also able to use them as a future reference.

Consider hosting an event where you introduce local geocaching club members to the team members of your Bomb Squad. Take time to show geocachers your robot and other equipment, while providing them with information on how you would like them to mark their caches. It is also helpful to teach geocachers the dangers associated with explosives and methamphetamine labs. Since geocachers often visit out of the way places, they are more likely to discover explosives, or even meth labs.

While hosting the community event with your local geocachers, make sure you advise them to place the word GEOCACHING on all sides of the container. This will ensure no matter which way the container is laid on the ground it will be displayed. Some containers that geocachers commonly use are:

- Ammunition cans
- Cardboard boxes
- Tupperware containers
- PVC pipes
- Old film containers

In some situations, the cache container will be secured to a fixed object at the location in which it is being stored. For example, on one particular response by the Louisville Bomb Squad, an ammunition can was secured to a tree with a bike chain, so that the container could be opened but not taken. Unfortunately, the container was not marked, and therefore was "rendered safe."



Once you establish a partnership with your local geocaching club, request a free login from the club leaders to the geocaching website, so you can search for coordinates to suspicious containers that you respond on, and that might be caches. By doing this, you will save yourself a lot of time and effort responding to such calls for service. The geocaching websites are a great source of information. Not only do they provide GPS locations, but the sites also provide the rules of the game.

Ask your local geocaching club if you can put an article in their newsletter, or web blast, explaining in detail how you would like containers marked. Specifically, identify the issues you have with unmarked containers. This is imperative so that geocachers understand why you are making such a request.

Even though these suggestions will assist you in responding to such calls, and possibly minimize team responses, continue to always treat every suspicious package with care. Even if it states it is a cache, always follow appropriate safety guidelines. If you would like more information about the geocaching world, go to the Official Global GPS Cache Hunt website at <http://www.geocaching.com>.

The author, Barry D. Denton is a Sergeant with the Louisville Metro Police Department.