

Suspect arrested in Islamic Cultural Center vandalization

By Jim Guy

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A worker replaces some of the broken windows knocked out in what police say was vandalism at the Islamic Cultural Center of Fresno. JIM GUY — THE FRESNO BEE

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A male suspect has been arrested in the Christmas Day vandalization of the Islamic Cultural Center in northeast Fresno, Fresno police said Friday night.



Police Chief Jerry Dyer, who called the incident a “brazen” hate crime, will provide more details Saturday morning at a news conference. No additional details were released Friday.

The crime took place at the center in the 2110 block of East Nees Avenue near Maple. Seven glass doors were shattered and the interior of the center was vandalized. The incident took place about 10 a.m., when the man used river rocks to break the doors and then went inside and smashed items, including the center’s podium.



Dyer said the man, who parked at the gate of the center and walked through the parking lot, was aware that he was

under video surveillance, but appeared unconcerned, even pausing to deliver an obscene gesture to one camera. The vandalism first took place about 10 a.m., when the man, dressed in a blue hat and jacket and baggy pants, approached the center and broke in. He left about 15 minutes later, but returned after several hours. The second time, he was dressed in a white shirt and was carrying a bottle of bleach, which he poured on several speakers and an American flag.

“He knew he was being videotaped and did not appear to have any concern,” Dyer said. The chief said the Federal Bureau of Investigation has been asked to join the case because it appears to be a hate crime. Police suspect the suspect purchased the bleach nearby and are also checking video cameras at area stores.

Members of Fresno’s faith community came to a Friday press conference to support the center and condemn the vandalism

Said Reza Nekumanesh, manager of the Islamic Center: “When something like this happens to one of us, it happens to all of us.”

The Council on American-Islamic Relations, a civil rights and advocacy group, condemned the vandalism and called for a federal hate-crime investigation.

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