

## State plans insurance arrests

*by Biz-Journal-SF*

Dozens of individuals from Pensacola to Miami are to be arrested this week for insurance fraud schemes the government estimated to total at least \$1 million. The state said the majority of the charges will fall under workers' compensation fraud.

That includes both claim fraud and employer fraud.

The state said its second-largest category of charges involve auto insurance fraud, from staged accidents to fraudulent personal injury protection (PIP) insurance claims.

Some of the cases involve insurance agents accused of defrauding customers and several homeowner claim fraud cases, the state added.

Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink disclosed the three-day operation - the culmination of months of investigations - stating she wants to send a strong message that Florida will not tolerate this costly crime.

The investigations, by the Department of Financial Services' division of insurance fraud, follow nearly 800 insurance fraud-related arrests in the last fiscal year.

"Those who commit insurance fraud may think they are only hurting insurance companies, but insurance fraud causes real financial pain and hurts families, businesses and communities," said Sink, who, as CFO, oversees the department. "Anyone found guilty of insurance fraud in Florida will pay for their crime."

The state said its operation is targeting nearly 80 individuals wanted on criminal charges ranging from staging automobile accidents to grand theft. State attorney offices in the various jurisdictions, including field offices in Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties, are prosecuting the charges.

Potential sentences could range from five years to 30 years in prison per count.

The state has estimated insurance fraud in Florida to cost Floridians as much as \$1,400 a year.

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