

PRESS RELEASE

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Staged Auto Accident Ring Busted

PHOENIX – The owner of an auto body shop and another man were arrested today, accused of staging auto accidents and collecting on fraudulent insurance claims. Guillermo “Willie” Altamirano, 33, owner of Champion Auto Body in Phoenix, was a key member of an organized crime syndicate that staged crashes to collect at least \$200,000 in fraudulent claims. The group relied on forged drivers’ licenses from Mexico and Guatemala, as well as disposable cell phones and prepaid credit cards, to purchase auto insurance under fictitious names.

Acting on a tip from State Farm Insurance, an undercover operation began in April at the 1536 West Broadway auto body shop. Arizona Department of Insurance agents took an undercover vehicle into the shop for collision-related repairs. Agents had a pretext policy on the vehicle, which was supplied for the investigation by Farmers Insurance and the National Insurance Crime Bureau. Altamirano took over the claim on the vehicle and allegedly caused additional damages to the vehicle to offset the deductible on the policy. Farmers Insurance issued a check for \$3,625.83 under the name of Champion Auto Body, as well as the name used by the undercover agent whose signature was forged when the check was cashed.

In another incident, Altamirano, using a fictitious Mexico driver’s license under the name of Victor Delgadillo, filed a hit & run claim with State Farm. He reported that his vehicle, a 1988 Volvo, was damaged by a hit and run driver while it was parked at the YMCA parking lot at 67th Avenue and Campbell. State Farm paid Champion Auto Body and Victor Delgadillo \$4,122.23 on the claim. Altamirano was charged with conspiracy, assisting a criminal syndicate, fraud schemes, theft and forgery.

Also arrested today was Rigoberto Lara-Corral, 48, the suspected ringleader of the operation, who was arrested on six counts ranging from conspiracy and participating in a criminal syndicate to forgery and identity theft. Lara-Corral is accused of conspiring with others to submit fraudulent insurance vehicle claims against several companies. Lara-Corral is accused of supplying vehicles, fraudulent Mexico drivers' licenses, prepaid credit cards, prepaid cell phones and forged Arizona motor vehicle titles. Lara-Corral, an undocumented Mexican National, is in the U.S. illegally awaiting a deportation hearing.

A third man, Juan Alejandro Villa, 25, was arrested Sept. 24th for his participation in the ring, which included filing at least five false claims worth nearly \$20,000. The investigation is ongoing and more arrests are expected.

Officers from the Arizona Department of Public Safety and the Phoenix Police Department assisted in today's arrests, which occurred early in the morning at two locations. Both State Farm and Farmers Insurance cooperated in the investigation.

Arizona Insurance Director Germaine Marks praised her investigators and those who assisted them. "It took months of intense investigation by our agents, as well as close cooperation between other law enforcement agencies and the insurance companies, to make these arrests," she said. "I'm very pleased that after everyone's hard work we were able to shut down this crime ring."

About the Arizona Department of Insurance

The Arizona Department of Insurance, an agency of the State of Arizona, is responsible for the education and protection of insurance consumers and for oversight of the insurance industry in the state.