

PRESS RELEASE

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FORENSIC ODONTOLOGY SNARES SNAGGLE-TOOTHED INSURANCE BANDIT

With the assistance of a forensic odontologist, the Arizona Department of Insurance Fraud Unit, the Department of Public Safety, and the Phoenix Police Department set a trap that resulted in the arrest of a man with a broken front tooth who is suspected of staging numerous slip-and-fall accidents.

The suspect, identified as Barney Miller, 30, of Phoenix, is charged with insurance fraud. He was booked at the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office. Other arrests are imminent.

Fraud Unit Chief Terry Cooper said that during the past year, several slip-and-fall accidents have occurred in restaurants and department stores throughout Arizona. In most cases, plumbing pipes were loosened in restrooms causing water to spill onto the floor, Cooper said.

"Two or more subjects enter the store or restaurant, one goes to the restroom and moments later comes out claiming the water on the floor caused him to slip," Cooper said. "He further claims to have sustained an injury, striking his mouth on the counter and/or fracturing his right hand. The subject seeks medical attention at a local hospital and dentist, and then files a claim with the business's insurance company seeking a quick settlement. In each case, the subject uses a different name."

The Insurance Fraud Unit began matching the claims with X-rays taken of the subjects' teeth by the dentists they consulted. The Fraud Unit contacted, Dr. John Piakis, a local forensic odontologist. Through the X-rays, it was determined that all of the claims were made by the same individual.

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The most recent claim, which was at an Arby's in Tucson, occurred March 4. On March 22, an insurance check was mailed to a private mail box business the suspect gave as his address. The Fraud Unit, DPS and Phoenix Police set up surveillance at the mail box.

On March 24, Miller was taken into custody when he picked up the insurance check. Miller's teeth were X-rayed and were matched to the individual making the fraudulent claims. Miller and others are believed to have received several thousand dollars in payment for fraudulent claims they submitted in this slip-and-fall scam.

"If you think you have been the victim of this type of insurance fraud scam, please contact the Arizona Department of Insurance Fraud Unit at 602-912-8418," Cooper said.