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Man charged with workers' comp fraud

An Escambia County man has been charged with workers' compensation fraud.

Mauricio Soto, 33, of Mauricio Soto Concrete Construction Inc., has been charged with workers' compensation fraud, a first-degree felony. If convicted, he faces up to 30 years behind bars and a \$10,000 fine.

Florida Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink announced the arrest today in a news release.

In the release, Sink said her Division of Insurance Fraud said Soto is charged with falsifying employment numbers with the intent of avoiding higher workers' compensation premium payments.

"Injured workers can face devastating medical bills and serious financial hardship if their employers aren't properly covered," Sink said in the news release. "I commend our Insurance Fraud investigators for exposing this criminal activity, and will continue to enforce compliance to make sure that all Floridians are protected on the job."

Following site inspections over the past year on job sites in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties, it was discovered that 32 individuals worked for Mauricio Soto Construction Inc.; however, audits and state records revealed Soto was reporting less.

When tipped off to the inconsistent number of employees reported, investigators also discovered that Soto owed nearly \$660,000 in premiums for workers' compensation coverage for the more than \$4 million he was paid in subcontracting fees in the past three years.

As Florida's CFO, Sink oversees the Department of Financial Services' Division of Workers' Compensation, which conducted nearly 30,000 onsite investigations of worksites to determine employer compliance for the 2008-2009 fiscal year.

The division also recently launched a new whistleblower Web site, which makes it easier for citizens to submit complaints online about suspected noncompliance and provides real-time feedback to complainants. Examples of noncompliant workers' compensation coverage include working without workers' compensation, underreporting payroll such as paying employees in cash instead of from checks from payroll, and misclassifying employees in order to receive a lower workers' compensation rate.

For more information about CFO Sink's Division of Workers Compensation or to submit a complaint, visit MyFloridaCFO.com.
