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Aisles of Fraud?

Faked Slip-and-Fall Accidents Cost Customers

By *Greg Hunter*

May 10, 2004 — Bruce Tarlowe slipped on a piece of lettuce in a New Jersey grocery store and sued, claiming permanent injuries.

The National Floor Safety Institute says Americans are paying about \$8 million a day for fraudulent slip-and-fall accidents. (ABCNEWS.com)

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But before the "accident," Tarlowe was caught on videotape, kicking the lettuce into position. He then strolled back, looked around, and down he went. Free after 90 days in jail on fraud and attempted theft charges, Tarlowe is now appealing his convictions.

"Roughly about \$8 million a day in fraudulent slips and falls are taking place," said Russ Kendzior, executive director of the National Floor Safety Institute. "We're the ones paying for this by way of increased costs for our food, for our gasoline, for everything that we consume. A percentage of that is to go to pay fraudulent claims."

Eduardo Pomare-Leon hired a lawyer after he fell in a puddle of soda in a supermarket in Atlanta, planning to sue. But before the fall, Pomare-Leon was caught on videotape taking the bottle off the shelf, looking around and pouring some on the floor.

Minutes later, he slipped and fell on the soda he spilled. He was caught, prosecuted, and served 90 days in jail.

Grandma Takes a Dive

Richard Dean said he was injured in a fall in a Long Island supermarket. A videotape, however, shows that although he slipped, he never fell. Before the "accident," Dean spilled fabric softener from his shopping cart right where he would later slip on it.

In spite of his so-called injuries, nine days later he was caught on tape again, carrying a refrigerator.

Instead of collecting \$2 million as he had hoped, Dean went to jail for a year. He was released last spring.



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Isabel Parker, a Philadelphia-area grandmother, fell 49 times in seven years, but videotapes showed a series of falls were fake. She walked around with a cane that she did not use.

Parker collected half a million dollars, but she was subsequently prosecuted and pled guilty to eight counts of insurance fraud, six counts of forgery and related charges for using aliases and filing bogus claims against stores between 1993 and 2000. She went to jail for six months.

Parker did not want to talk about her felonies when *Good Morning America* paid a visit to her home. In fact, she called the police.

Las Vegas is another prime stop for those who want to commit fraud. One man who appeared to have fallen down a casino escalator was caught on videotape, faking the fall. When the casino showed him the video, they say he decided not to file any claims.

Gamblers aren't the only ones trying to cash in. One expert says as many as 20 percent of those who fall in Las Vegas are faking it.

"These can be very lucrative scams and they're very hard to disprove unless you have a



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surveillance tape in the store to catch them in the act," said James Quiggle, director of communications for the Coalition Against Insurance Fraud.

A Fortune Teller Spills

Debbie Williams, a fortune teller, was caught faking a fall in aisle nine of a New York City grocery store. Williams — who is also a fortune teller — knew she was going to fall before she walked into the store.

"You see her knees, she actually sits down," said Bruce Torino, a supermarket attorney said. "And she pushes the cart away. That would not be a normal reaction."

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Williams tried to make things look more authentic by smearing some kind of liquid on the floor and in her hair. In a little over a year, the store's lawyer says, Williams and her friend Gina Miller fell and filed injury claims 10 times. The two were nicknamed "the Nose Ring."

"They always seemed to have an injury to the nose — no matter how they fell, backwards, forwards or sideways," Torino said. One time, Williams tugged an electrical cord into position and then tripped on it, he said.

The two women were arrested, prosecuted, and pled guilty to an "attempted scheme to defraud," a misdemeanor, in two of those falls. Their punishment: one night in jail, and a \$1,000 fine. "They went from one location to the other, in order to make money by stealing from you and me," Torino said. ■

Good Morning America Correction

On March 3, 2004, *Good Morning America* broadcast a report about workers compensation fraud. The report included footage of Crystal Burrill at a ranch. The tape we broadcast on the air was given to us by the California Department of Insurance and incorrectly identifies Ms. Burrill as someone who committed workers compensation applicant fraud. In fact, workers compensation fraud charges filed against Ms. Burrill were dismissed by a judge on the merits. We relied on the tape and other information we received from the California Department of Insurance, but that information was incorrect, and we wanted to set the record straight.



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