

Ohio boosting efforts to reduce Worker's Comp claims abuse

By: Jim Otte, WHIO-TV

For Scott Macek, defrauding the Ohio Bureau of Worker's Compensation was easy.

The Dayton native and Navy veteran said the only surprise for him was how simple it was.

"I thought it would be harder and that there would be more rules and regulations or something to stop you from gaming the system," Macek said.

Investigators for the state's Bureau of Worker's Compensation caught Macek on camera working for Kissel Brothers Rides as a mechanic at the Van Wert County Fair while he was claiming to be disabled with a back injury. He was illegally collecting both disability benefits and a paycheck.

Macek had been hurt in an earlier job, and began receiving worker's compensation.

But after he began feeling better and took another job, he repeatedly signed documents stating he was not working, so the compensation checks continued to arrive.

Macek received four years in prison for the fraud.

"You go to the doctor, they write you 'off work,' (then you) find some job underneath the table, and you go to work," Macek said.

The Ohio BWC is increasing its efforts to publicize fraud enforcement as it seeks to reduce abuse that affects an estimated 5 to 10 percent of its cases.

The BWC paid more than \$1.8 billion in claims last year, meaning fraud could be costing the system up to \$180 million a year.

Macek's case is one of several now being publicized by the BWC.

"It is a very, very high priority," said Stephen Buehrer, administrator/CEO of the Ohio Bureau of Workers Compensation.

The BWC is the largest state workers compensation insurance system in the nation, with assets of \$26 billion.

Since Buehrer's arrival at the bureau in January, he has placed an emphasis on not only prosecuting fraud cases, but also making them public.

"We need to go out and pursue all kinds of fraud, whether its injured worker, employer or provider. We've got to get out and do that," Buehrer said.

He sees the move as important for protecting the integrity of the system and to keep it operating for the 250,000 employers they serve statewide.

Throughout its 100-year history, the BWC has been the target of criticism from employers and politicians.

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**Coalition Against
Insurance Fraud**

Former Ohio Governor George Voinovich called the bureau the "silent killer of jobs in Ohio" because of high costs that employers pay.

Ten years later the BWC was caught in an embarrassing and expensive scandal in which its board had approved investing some of its assets in a fund that traded in gold coins, Beanie Babies, baseball cards and other collectables, the investments that became known as "Coingate."

How to detect fraud

Tom Wersell, director of BWC's Special Investigation Division, said investigations usually begin as tips from neighbors, former employers, or former spouses.

James Quiggle, communications director of the **Coalition Against Insurance Fraud**, calls social media the "trap door through which investigators can climb."

"Using false identities raises potential issues of good faith that could cause trouble to an insurer and an investigation. That approach is very dubious all the way around," he said.