Lewis County man sentenced to 90 days for workers' compensation fraud

Local News

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Tumwater, WA - Joseph Woolf of Onalaska has been sentenced to 90 days in jail and 12 months of community supervision for illegally collecting workers’ compensation pension benefits while working on his family owned farm.

Woolf was also ordered to repay the Department of Labor & Industries (L&I) more than $200,000 he illegally collected, plus penalties and court costs.

Woolf, 54, was receiving pension benefits based on a lower-back injury from working on the family farm. While claiming that the injury left him permanently unable to work, he continued to perform all of his normal activities on the farm.

L&I began the investigation after receiving tips from family members. The investigation led to the Lewis County prosecuting attorney filing felony charges. Woolf pleaded guilty to one count of first-degree theft and was sentenced Sept. 16.

“Cheating the workers’ compensation system is not a victimless crime,” said Carl Hammersburg, manager of L&I’s Fraud Prevention and Compliance Program. “Cheating hurts workers and employers financially by driving up everyone’s premium costs.”

Hammersburg thanked the Lewis County prosecutor for pursuing a plea agreement that included jail time.

Hammersburg said L&I avoided over $600,000 in estimated lifetime additional benefits and medical expenses had Woolf remained on the workers’ compensation rolls.

L&I’s fraud Web site, www.Fraud.Lni.wa.gov, includes an online form for reporting fraud. Anyone who suspects fraud may also call L&I’s fraud hotline at 1-888-811-5974.