

## Solano's fraud squad: D.A.'s team targets swindlers

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A team of Solano County prosecutors are working hard to make sure that those committing fraud, either in their business, or against unwitting citizens, are brought to justice.

The Solano County District Attorney's Office employs four deputy district attorneys to handle a multitude of fraud cases. Those cases can range from welfare fraud, worker's compensation fraud, consumer fraud, real estate fraud, identity theft and even environmental crimes arising from fraudulent business practices.

According to prosecutors, fraud cases are on the rise.

"These are crimes of opportunity," said Deputy District Attorney Judy Ycasas, who handles welfare and auto insurance fraud cases.

Ycasas, who has been in the unit since 2009, said that cases commonly range from unscrupulous auto repair shops who bill insurance companies for parts that are never used or purchased, to fake police reports alleging a car was stolen when it wasn't, to uninsured motorists crashing their car, only to purchase a policy after the fact and make a claim using a false date.

On the real estate front, Deputy District Attorney Laura Undlin said that scams involving loan modifications and rental homes have increased.

She warns the public that con artists promising that they can adjust your loan cannot take money up front for their services.

"They're contacting these desperate homeowners and it's ripe for a scam," Undlin said.

Another concerning trend is people locating vacant homes, changing the locks, and posting ads on the Internet offering to rent them out. In those cases, the renter might never meet the so-called homeowner face to face and doesn't know it's a scam until the police, the actual owner or a bank representative comes knocking on the door.

"We just want to caution the public. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is," Undlin said.

Worker's compensation fraud is another area that Solano County prosecutors deal with.

Deputy District Attorney Janice Williams is tasked with prosecuting cases where employees file false claims with their employer, but also cases in which employers cheat on the premiums they pay into the system.

However, Williams said it is more common to see medical providers over-billing for medications or procedures, and in some cases billing for services or medications that never went to an injured person.

"Hopefully we're saving the state some money. These are our tax dollars. They're taking that away from those who deserve it and make premiums higher for everyone else," Williams said.

Fraud also occurs when businesses and corporations skirt environmental regulations. That is where Deputy District Attorney Diane Taira, who also handles consumer fraud cases, steps in.

These types of cases often result in settlements with large retailers in connection with violations of state laws for safe storage, handling and disposal of hazardous waste. Solano County has recently been included in multi-county settlements with several retail chains which have netted large sums of money in civil penalties.

But even in cases where someone has been defrauded and there's no hope of restitution for the victim, the fraud team is not deterred. It's all about seeking justice.

"That's our job," Undlin said.

The Solano County District Attorney's Office has resources for victims of fraud, or those wishing to report it, on it's web page, which can be found at [www.solanocounty.com](http://www.solanocounty.com). Reports or questions can also be directed to the Solano County District Attorney's Office main line at 784-6800.

Additional phone numbers for reporting fraud:

\* Consumer fraud, 784-6859

\* Welfare fraud, 784-6424

\* Real estate fraud, 866-463-6380

\* Insurance fraud, 751-2000

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