



OFFICE OF
THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

BONNIE M. DUMANIS
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

San Diego
330 West Broadway
San Diego, CA 92101
(619) 531-4040

<http://www.sandiegoda.com>

JESUS RODRIGUEZ
ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY

For Immediate Release
November 5, 2007

Contact: [Paul Levikow](#)
619-531-3536

District Attorney Charges Unlicensed Contractors for Preying on Wildfire Victims

DA Undercover Investigators Posed as Homeowners During Sting

San Diego County District Attorney [Bonnie M. Dumanis](#) announced today that eight individuals are facing felony charges for contracting without a license in the wake of San Diego's recent wildfires. All of the defendants advertised to residents who had lost homes in the fires.

"Our office is working to keep those affected by the fires from being re-victimized," said DA Dumanis. "Offering repair or rebuilding services as an unlicensed contractor during this state of emergency is a felony crime and we will continue to keep these types of individuals from taking advantage of residents in all areas of the county."

San Diego County District Attorney Investigators worked undercover along with the California Department of Insurance, Contractors State License Board, Drug Enforcement Administration, California State Controller's Office, and the California Department of Toxic Substance Control to make the arrests.

"Department of Insurance investigators were on the ground in the first days after the fire, looking for illegal activity," said Insurance Commissioner Steve Poizner. "We're continuing to work closely with agencies like the District Attorney's Office to keep people from getting scammed at a time when they are so vulnerable."

Two of the unlicensed contractors were arraigned today in Superior Court downtown and pleaded not guilty to the charges. If convicted, they face up to three years in state prison and a \$10,000 fine. They are: Michael Andrew Hudanich, 50, of San Diego; and Saul Ramirez Santiago, 20. Carlos Leonel Palacios, 34, of San Diego; Michael Norman Mitchell, 47, of San Diego; and Gene Paul West, 46 will be arraigned at a later date.

Three other unlicensed contractors were arrested during a similar sting in Ramona last week. Their arraignments are expected on Tuesday, November 6. Continuing undercover sting operations are planned for all other areas of county affected by the fires. The District Attorney's Office has been proactively warning residents to be aware of [illegal activity](#) in the wake of the fires, including unlicensed contractors, charity scams, and insurance fraud.

###