

Press Release:

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ENGLEWOOD BUSINESSMAN CHARGED WITH WORKERS' COMP FRAUD

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ENGLEWOOD—Florida Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink announced today that the owner of Don Estlund's Tree Service is facing a charge of operating without workers' compensation insurance. Donald Robert Estlund allegedly admitted to operating for eight years without the state-mandated coverage, after an employee incurred a staggering medical debt due to an injury he received on the job.

Estlund, 41, was arrested on the charge Thursday and was booked into the Sarasota County Jail. If convicted on the charge filed against him, Estlund could be sentenced to up to 15 years in prison in addition to restitution and fines. Detectives with the Department of Financial Services (DFS), Division of Insurance Fraud, began investigating the company after an employee suffered a catastrophic injury on the job nearly two years ago and incurred more than \$255,000 in unpaid medical bills. Detective Steven Firestone was the division's lead investigator and the Sarasota County Sheriff's Office assisted with the arrest.

"Workers' compensation insurance is required by state law to protect workers, and is especially crucial to those serving in high-risk jobs," said CFO Sink, who oversees the DFS. "This individual knowingly put his employees at risk, and we believe he deserves the maximum penalty under the law."

On July 1, 2005, Estlund's employee, Bryan Aicher, suffered a catastrophic injury when his left arm and hand were crushed by a falling 12-foot section of tree. Aicher incurred \$255,759 in medical expenses. Detectives said because Estlund operated outside of the law, Aicher has found himself solely responsible for all injury-related bills. However, if convicted, Estlund could be held responsible for all expenses that would have been covered by the workers' compensation insurance, including Aicher's medical bills, rehabilitation expenses, and loss of wages.

The Department of Financial Services, Division of Insurance Fraud, investigates fraud in all types of insurance, including health, life, auto, property and workers' compensation. To report information about this case or any other possible insurance fraud case, call the department's fraud hotline at 1-800-378-0445. A reward of up to \$25,000 may be offered for information leading to a conviction.

As a statewide elected officer of the Florida Cabinet, Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink oversees the Department of Financial Services, a multi-division state agency responsible for management of state funds and unclaimed property, assisting consumers who request information and help related to financial services, and investigating financial fraud. Sink also serves as the State Fire Marshal.