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Orange County sting operation targets auto body shops

Richard Evans, who once appeared on the Speed Channel reality show 'Chop Cut Rebuild,' is among 53 mechanics arrested on suspicion of insurance fraud.

By Ann M. Simmons, Los Angeles Times

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An insurance fraud sting targeting auto body repair shops in Orange County ended with the arrest of 53 mechanics Wednesday and Thursday, including Richard Evans, who once appeared on the Speed Channel reality show "Chop Cut Rebuild."

Evans owns Huntington Beach Bodyworks.

The Orange County district attorney's office conducted 152 covert investigations from January to May in Operation Straight Body, which targeted repair shops that had received consumer complaints over the last three years, authorities said.

Investigators used several methods to conduct their sting. In some cases, they obtained a car determined by an insurance company to be totaled after sustaining rear-end damage in a collision, with its rear bumper missing and the rear frame rails bent. They then backed the car into a telephone pole, causing a dent in the rear hatch.

Investigators took the car to one of the targeted auto body shops and asked for an estimate to repair the damage, authorities said. An undercover agent explained that the vehicle had been bought without a bumper and asked that it and the damaged frame be repaired under the same insurance claim — even though the bumper was missing at the time of purchase.

The suspect mechanics agreed to include the damages under one insurance estimate, authorities said. Each mechanic was charged with one felony count of insurance fraud, prosecutors said.

If convicted, they face a maximum five years in state prison, prosecutors said.

The in-custody defendants who have not posted \$30,000 bail were scheduled to be arraigned Thursday and Friday at Orange County's central jail in Santa Ana, according to officials in the district attorney's office.

"Insurance fraud hurts every Orange County family because insurance companies pass on the cost of fraud to their customers," Orange County Dist. Atty. Tony Rackauckas said in a statement.