

RHODE ISLAND Lawyers Weekly

Immigrant worker gets \$30K in suit

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An illegal immigrant from Mexico has won \$30,000 in a settlement with his former employer after accidentally injuring himself with a chain saw.

Edgar Velasquez, who worked for a tree service company in Warwick, was chopping tree branches on March 31, 2006, when he accidentally slashed his face, slicing his nose, eyelid and forehead.

Velasquez sued William Gorman Jr., his former boss and owner of Billy G's Tree Care, seeking compensation for his injuries. He also accused Gorman of notifying immigration authorities that he was here illegally in an attempt to block him from pursuing his case.

Immigration agents arrested Velasquez in August 2006 on the day of a scheduled court hearing. Although Velasquez was deported, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security later granted him a humanitarian visa to return to the United States for three months for his court case.

Workers' Compensation Court Chief Judge George E. Healey Jr. said he did not want "unscrupulous" employers to think they could avoid responsibility if a worker gets injured in an unsafe workplace.

Velasquez's lawyer, Stephen J. Dennis of Providence, said he had wanted more than \$70,000 for his client.

If Gorman does not make the required payments, the state will fine him \$150,000 for not having workers' compensation at the time Velasquez was injured.

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