

Department of Justice  
U.S. Attorney's Office

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District of Montana

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Former Postal Employee Sentenced to Prison and Ordered to Pay Almost \$1.0 Million for Fraudulently Obtaining Workers' Compensation Benefits**

GREAT FALLS - The United States Attorney's Office announced today that Deborah Joy Durand, a 55-year-old resident of Fruitland, Idaho, was sentenced to 15 months in prison, two years of supervised release, and ordered to pay \$903,316.48 in restitution and forfeiture. U.S. District Court Judge Brian Morris Morris presided over the sentencing hearing.

At trial, the government presented the following evidence. Durand had a back injury from her job at the Post Office. She had back surgery and was unable to work for a period of time. But instead of returning to work when capable, Durand obtained total disability status. Special Agents from the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General obtained evidence that Durand was feeding horses, lifting hay bales, jogging in the mornings, clearing land, running chainsaws, removing stumps from fallen trees, building fences, mowing the lawn every week, riding horses twice a week, and many other physically challenging activities.

Durand also participated in other physical activities including a lengthy three-day kayaking trip where she paddled approximately 30 miles in open ocean water, among other strenuous physical activities. Durand claimed she could not sit or stand for long, and she was "totally sedentary." She even claimed she was unable to work in any capacity.

At trial, Durand was convicted of four counts of fraud related to obtaining workers' compensation benefits. In total, Durand received over \$664,828.16 based on her claims for workers' compensation. Of that amount, she received \$238,488.32 for wages, despite having the ability to work at least a desk job at the Post Office.

U.S. Attorney Kurt Alme stated, "The Federal Worker's Compensation Program is there to help the truly injured. The public should be assured that individuals who defraud that Program in Montana will be held accountable. I applaud the efforts of the USPS Office of Inspector General and Ryan Weldon of our office in bringing this case to justice."

This case was investigated by the USPS Office of Inspector General. Acting Executive Special Agent-in-Charge Jeff Krafels said, "The majority of Postal Service employees are dedicated, hardworking, and trustworthy professionals who would never consider engaging in criminal conduct. However, when attempts to defraud the Federal Workers' Compensation Program arise, those acts will not be tolerated, and they will be vigorously investigated by the USPS Office of Inspector General. The Workers' Compensation Program is designed to ensure that individuals injured during the performance of their duties receive appropriate medical care and compensation. The conviction and sentence in this case are a result of the commitment between the United States Attorney's Office and the USPS Office of Inspector General, to ensure the integrity of the Federal Workers' Compensation Program, and to hold those accountable for defrauding the program."

Because there is no parole in the federal system, the truth in sentencing guidelines mandate that Durand will likely serve all of the time imposed by the court. In the federal system, Durand does have the opportunity to shorten the term of custody by earning credit for good behavior. However, this reduction will not exceed 15% of the overall sentence.

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