

## 180 PEOPLE IN SC RECEIVED OVERPAYMENTS OF JOBLESS BENEFITS



Authorities in the South Carolina area have said that they will be going after approximately 180 different people who received at least \$10,000 each, possibly more, in jobless benefits that they did not earn. The state of South Carolina is making an effort to really crack down on unemployment insurance fraud because it seems to be happening too often. The 180 people will even face potential criminal prosecution. A spokesperson for the State Department of Employment and Workforce, Mary-Kathryn Craft, confirmed this. The United States Department of Labor has made an estimate that South Carolina gave out about \$86.2 million in unemployment insurance within the last year. Estimated overpayments are at a about \$94.4 million in the fiscal year of 2012 and \$176 million for the fiscal year of 2008 through 2009. Many improper payments were sent out in South Carolina during the recession which caused the economy to take a turn for the worse. Because many people were desperate after being laid off due to the crippling economy, they took a risk which could now leave them in a lot of trouble with the law. Craft says, "Fraud has increased as more people are out of work and willing to risk committing fraud to get benefits." One of the main causes of the overpayments in South Carolina was that there were several people who continued to collect, even after they had finally found employment. Some of these people received part-time employment but failed to report it so that their unemployment benefits would not decrease. This is, however, considered fraud. In December, the State Department of Employment and Workforce made an announcement that they will be working with the United States Labor Department for an inspection of unemployment insurance fraud and the 180 people who are being accused of such fraud. It is believed that the 180 people could pay back the excess money they were given as a way of paying back the overpayments that were handed out to them. The amount a person makes with their unemployment benefits varies depending upon the type of job they lost and what they made while employed. On average, in South Carolina, \$239 is the usual weekly payout. The maximum weekly payout is approximately \$326. Craft says that they were able to catch overpayments by cross-matching the wage with employment information and various employers. Craft says employers should enter new employees into a database which would prove that these individuals were, in fact, hired for work. Collecting these overpayments from the 180 people could help the state of South Carolina to pay back some of their federal loans, especially since the state had to borrow money from the federal government.

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