

11 charged in staged collision on Highway 400

By NOOR JAVED

Staff Reporter

It started off as a common traffic accident on one of Toronto's busiest highways.

A collision between a Pontiac Grand Prix and a Plymouth Voyager minivan shut down traffic on Highway 400 just north of Lloydtown-Aurora Rd on a hot June afternoon in 2009.

Two officers arrived on the scene to find nine injured people, and two tow trucks already there. When the questioning began, police realized that not everything was as it seemed. The collision appeared staged, the injuries falsified.

This week, after a lengthy investigation, the Ontario Provincial Police charged 11 people — including the two truck drivers — with fraud.

"Each accident is getting more and more sophisticated. It's hard to pinpoint what makes a case suspicious" said Kirk Quinn, a team leader for the Ontario injury rings investigations unit for the Insurance Bureau of Canada who heard about incident.

"But in this case, the allegation is that the collision didn't happen as reported and evidence at the scene might not be consistent with what they are claiming took place," Quinn said.

A combination of inconsistent reports, information obtained from individual insurance companies and cellphone records led to the arrests, police said.

Quinn said accident fraud in the GTA "is much more extensive than anyone will realize."

In many cases, people are coerced to participate, others are persuaded by their friends, and many are lured by the prospect of cashing in, he said.

In 2008, Toronto police arrested 14 people across the GTA, alleging accidents were being staged to collect insurance money.

In those cases, centred in Scarborough, police said wrecked vehicles were purchased and superficially repaired, insured for far more than they were worth and then involved in staged collisions.

More than \$650,000 in insurance claims had been filed, and in each case, several people claimed injuries, even if they weren't in the accident.

Each of the 11 people charged in the Highway 400 incident faces two counts of conspiracy to commit fraud over \$5,000, obstructing a peace officer and public mischief.

Charged are Toronto residents Sarab Abdul-Masek, 41, Hanna Barkho, 41, Marlin Oshana, 50, and Whaida Ishak, 28.

Also charged are Michael Moses Gerrick, 27, Nadiay Khamo, 43, and Jeffery Poku-Aidoo, 32, of Mississauga, Basil Nona, 37, and Evan Nona, 23, of Newmarket, Tara Natasha Yearwood, 33, of Brampton, and Samuel Baakye, 22, of Whitby.

With files from Teri Pecoskie

