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EX-PENNDOT WORKER FACES FEDERAL CHARGES

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BODY:

A Turtle Creek man who has denied involvement in a scheme to sell commercial driver's licenses and hazardous materials permits has been indicted on federal charges he sold the licenses to 20 Middle Eastern men.

A 20-count indictment was unsealed yesterday in U.S. District Court against Robert Ferrari, a former driver's license examiner for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. Ferrari is to be arraigned Oct. 25 by U.S. Magistrate Judge Ila Jeanne Sensenich.

Ferrari, 57, worked for PennDOT for five years before he was fired in April 2000 after an internal PennDOT review showed Ferrari sold dozens of driver's licenses and hazardous materials permits. At that time, PennDOT referred the matter to the state attorney general's office for a criminal investigation.

PennDOT announced earlier this week that it had canceled 111 commercial and noncommercial driver's licenses connected with the scheme.

During an interview last week with the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Ferrari denied he sold driver's licenses or hazardous materials permits, but admitted he made two "errors" in paperwork on cases that involved Middle Eastern men who were arrested two weeks ago in Washington state.

Ferrari could not be reached yesterday. His wife, Janice, yesterday shut the door of their Turtle Creek home and refused to comment.

The federal indictment against Ferrari returned by a grand jury Thursday charges that he illegally provided commercial driver's licenses to 20 men, all of whom were named in federal indictments returned in Pittsburgh this week.

State investigators suspect the scheme may have involved the sale of more than 150 commercial and non-commercial driver's licenses, as well as dozens of hazmat transportation permits. The state investigation involves allegations of license-selling that go back more than a year before the first federal incident in July 1999.

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Ferrari has been named, but not charged, in two state criminal cases as the person who sold fraudulent driver's licenses for \$1,500 each to two men who saw their licenses suspended for drunken driving convictions. Those cases are pending in Allegheny County Common Pleas Court.

In one of the state criminal cases, one of the defendants told investigators he met with Ferrari because he knew that Ferrari "issued bogus licenses in return for money on a routine basis."

Four of the defendants charged in federal court with receiving the fraudulent licenses from Ferrari were arraigned yesterday.

Three of the men -- Kumeit Al-Saraf, 33, Ali Alubiedy, 34, and Mohammed Alibrahimi, 32 -- are from the Pittsburgh area and were allowed to remain free on bond. Alubiedy and Alibrahimi are cousins who own S.A.M. Auto Body on Brownsville Road in Carrick. Al-Saraf works at the business.

The fourth defendant arraigned yesterday, Raad Al-Maleky, 29, was initially arrested in Tennessee and had his first court appearance in Chattanooga. U.S. Chief Magistrate Judge Kenneth Benson yesterday allowed Al-Maleky to remain free on the \$20,000 bond set last week in Tennessee.

All four defendants pleaded not guilty.

Other defendants in the case who have yet to be arraigned are Haider Al-Tamimi, 28; Hussain Sudani, 33; Mustafa Al-Aboody, 29; Ali Alazawi, 29; Hussain Al-Obaidi, 34; Akeel Al Aboudy, 24; Alawi Al-Baraa, 33; Hatef Al-Atabi, 36; Sabah Al Hachami, 47; **Hisham Al-Shiblawy**, 23; Fadhil Al-Khaledy, 33; Samir Almazaal, 29; Wathek Al-Atabi, 26; Kamel Albred, 33; Haider Alshomary, 29; and Arkan Alandon, 29.

All 20 defendants were indicted on charges they illegally obtained commercial driver's licenses. All the defendants but Alandon and Al-Saraf are also charged with illegally obtaining hazmat transportation permits.

Federal officials have said they have no evidence the defendants in the driver's license scheme are connected with the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in New York City and at the Pentagon.

But the attorney for one of the defendants yesterday asked for a non-jury trial and said afterward he decided to do so because it would be difficult to divorce the case from the terrorist attacks.

"I think there's going to be some problems with juries," said attorney Lee Markovitz, who represents Alubiedy. "The [defendants] are all Arabs and, despite the denials of the FBI, they're still connected with the Sept. 11 attacks in the public's mind."

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