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Ex-cons seeking security posts accused of lies

Applicant crackdown nets 40

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Forty convicts accused of lying about criminal records on security job applications have been slapped with a new charge of falsifying documents following a three-week, statewide sweep designed to tighten supervision of the security industry, New Jersey authorities said yesterday.

The offenses of those snared in the State Police investigation, dubbed "Operation Sentry," included manslaughter, sex offenses, burglary, theft and drug dealing. Each of the 40 men and women was charged with a disorderly person offense.

"The law prohibits people of certain convictions from getting jobs as security guards," said New Jersey Attorney General Peter C. Harvey. "Most people assume when we walk into a dark parking lot that the security guard is someone of high integrity. It's disturbing that someone working (as a security guard) has been convicted of a crime."

The 40 convicts had not applied for high-level security jobs, said Paul Loriquet, spokesman for the Attorney General's Office. And in most cases, the guards would have had "limited power" and no access to guns.

It was unclear whether any of those charged had already started working at a security job, but they had all indicated on notarized documents they had no criminal backgrounds, authorities said.

The sweep was intended to serve as a prelude to the Security Guard Act of 2005, which takes effect in September. The measure allows police departments to charge certain ex-convicts with a disorderly person offense if they are working in the security field.

Prior to the new law, applicants found to have criminal histories would have just been fired.

"As we tighten up the character and professionalism of the security industry, we will all feel better about the safety of our families at malls, amusement parks and parking lots," State Police Superintendent Col. Rick Fuentes said in a statement. "Through Operation Sentry, we are showing convicted criminals that there's a price to pay for lying on security guard applications."

Harvey said the new law will serve as a deterrent because it brings attention to the cases and may make convicts think twice about applying for a job as a security officer. He also hopes the Security Guard Act will be a wake-up call for private companies.

"It will raise the question for private sector companies to find out if their security guards were properly screened," he said.

The final approval stages of the act include training and certification for the security industry. The training involves lessons on homeland security, first aid, ethics and law statutes. Certification requires that criminal background checks must be completed before the person is hired.

Private detective agencies and security firms who hire security guards will have Internet access to a database of certified guards. Inclusion in this list means that a person has met the requirements necessary to be hired as a guard, according to the attorney general's office.

In the past, the State Police notified private detective agencies and security firms when fingerprint checks showed applicants had criminal records.

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