



The City of New York
Department of Investigation

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DOI ARRESTS FIREFIGHTER FOR ALLEGED UNEMPLOYMENT FRAUD
--More than \$7,000 taken from New York State funds--

ROSE GILL HEARN, Commissioner of the Department of Investigation (“DOI”), announced today the arrest of LEO LOPEZ, a Firefighter with the New York City Fire Department (“FDNY”), for allegedly receiving unemployment benefits from the New York State Department of Labor in the amount of \$7,455 while at the same time receiving a salary from the FDNY.

LOPEZ, 34, of Manhattan, has been arrested for Grand Larceny in the Third Degree, a class D felony. If convicted, he faces up to seven years in jail.

Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn said, “Unemployment benefits are there to help those who do not have a job. As these allegations show, this individual tried to take advantage of that. He even brazenly wore his Fire Department uniform while he cashed an unemployment check. City employees should know it’s illegal to collect unemployment while they work and they risk possible prison time if they engage in that criminal behavior.”

Last week, DOI investigators received a complaint from the New York State Department of Labor alleging that LOPEZ illegally received unemployment benefits from the State Department of Labor from May 2004 through October 2004. LOPEZ was sworn in as a New York City Firefighter in May 2004. A DOI investigation found that each week, for 19 weeks, LOPEZ cashed a New York State unemployment check for \$362.70, totaling \$7,455. At the same time, LOPEZ was collecting his FDNY salary. During its investigation, DOI determined that on Oct. 8, 2004, LOPEZ cashed both his unemployment and his FDNY check at the same time and place. On July 27, 2004, LOPEZ cashed an unemployment check while in FDNY uniform.

DOI determined that LOPEZ was cashing his unemployment checks at a check-cashing business in Upper Manhattan, which provided investigators with a printout of all of LOPEZ’s transactions including his FDNY paychecks. In addition, each transaction was accompanied by a photograph taken of LOPEZ during the transaction. LOPEZ failed to make any restitution to the New York State Department of Labor despite their attempts to recover the funds.

Commissioner Gill Hearn thanked FDNY Commissioner Nicholas Scoppetta, the New York State Department of Labor and the New York County District Attorney's Office for their assistance and cooperation in this case.

This investigation was conducted by DOI's Office of the Inspector General for FDNY. The Office of New York County District Attorney Robert M. Morgenthau is prosecuting the case.

Criminal complaints are merely accusations. Defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

DOI is one of the oldest law-enforcement agencies in the country. The agency investigates and refers for prosecution City employees and contractors engaged in corrupt or fraudulent activities or unethical conduct. Investigations may involve any agency, officer, elected official or employee of the City, as well as those who do business with or receive benefits from the City.

***Get the worms out of the apple.
To report someone ripping off the City, call 311 or DOI directly at (212) 825-5959.***