Crash cases with links to Romanian 'Soprano' dismissed

Amy Molloy

FIVE personal injury claims linked to a man referred to as "Romania's answer to Tony Soprano" were dismissed in Galway Circuit Court.

The claims – two rear-ending accidents which allegedly happened eight years ago – have shone a light on how easy it is to try to abuse Ireland's personal injury system.

They also exposed how those involved in bringing spurious claims are facing no repercussions.

Compelling evidence gathered by Aviva Insurance as part of 'Operation Poc Fada' has identified up to 20 accidents which led to more than 70 personal injury claims – all of which they believe to have arisen from staged crashes involving members of the Roma and Travelling communities.

In 2015, Justice Raymond Groarke dismissed two of these claims brought following a crash in Blanchardstown, Dublin.

His scathing judgment said he had "no doubt whatsoever that the people involved were engaged in criminal activity".

He concluded a group of Romanian immigrants were working with Irish Travellers to set up fake crashes.

The judge threw out the €38,000 claims of brothers John and Martin Corcoran, originally from Galway but now living in a London halting site.

Despite Justice Groarke lambasting the parties involved, and declaring the claims as fraudulent, the two brothers appealed his decision to the High Court.

The case has experienced numerous adjournments and remains ongoing, racking up significant legal costs in the process.

A senior source revealed how one of the people involved in these crashes initially denied there was anything untoward going on when gardaí called to his home.

He later broke down and admitted the accidents he was involved in were all fake and he was being paid to crash into people.

The individual claimed he was in fear of his life as the man behind them is "Romania's Tony Soprano".

When gardaí again called to his home the next day it became apparent he had absconded, and efforts to track him down since have been unsuccessful.

The claims dismissed in Galway last Wednesday and Thursday, it is submitted by Aviva, are part of the same sham operation.

Mr Justice Groarke, who also presided over these cases, dismissed five of the claims and awarded costs to Aviva.

But while the decision represents a victory for the insurer, which says if the claims were successful they could potentially have resulted in compensation pay-outs worth up to €2m, the company says the likelihood of recovering its costs is slim.

"A formal complaint to the gardaí in relation to all these accidents has been made and I am satisfied that the five dismissals in Galway this week is

vindication of our approach," said Rob Smyth, head of Aviva's investigations unit.

Mr Smyth says the historical

practice of settling this type of claim to avoid the risk of paying out significant compensation has aggravated the insurance fraud problem.

In the 2015 case, Judge Groarke accepted evidence provided by Aviva that indicated that the accident never occurred.

He also accepted it was linked to numerous other staged accidents that allegedly took place in west of Ireland.

Aviva uncovered the extent of fraud through a vast amount of research by its investigation unit.

Through social media channels, investigators learned how many of those involved in the multiple crashes knew each other personally.

It also transpired those involved were switching insurance policies.

"I urge the remaining 40 claimants to contact their legal representatives and withdraw their claims, dragging us to the steps of courts in the

expectation that we will settle their claim will not change Aviva's approach," Mr Smyth said.

"There will be no settlements, we will present our evidence to the court, allow the judges to decide the outcome and if successful we will explore avenues to pursue the recovery of our costs."

'No doubt the people involved were engaged in criminal activity'

Mob tactics: One participant said he feared for his safety, as the man behind the claims is 'Romania's Tony Soprano'