

Iron 44 tragedy: Former Carson VP disputes judgment

By Nick Morgan Mail Tribune May 16, 2019 04:29 PM



An executive with a Grants Pass helicopter company that lied about its aircraft's capacity prior to a fiery crash that killed seven Southern Oregon firefighters is disputing the tens of millions of dollars he'll be ordered to pay once he is released from prison.

[Steven Metheny](#), vice president of now-defunct Carson Helicopters, is serving more than 12-1/2 years in federal prison for his role in the crash that killed crews en route to the Iron 44 wildfire complex in Northern California in summer 2008. He says he wouldn't have pleaded guilty had he known he'd

have to pay a restitution of more than \$51 million, according to documents filed earlier this month in U.S. District Court in Medford.

Metheny claims that his defense lawyer assured him that he wouldn't have to pay any damages because by June 2013, Carson's contract "was canceled and never re-bid" and "the resultant cost and subsequent loss would equal zero dollars," according to an affidavit Metheny typed from Federal Correctional Institution Lompoc and filed in court May 7.

Metheny claims he was "repeatedly promised" ahead of his sentencing that the loss amount would be "zero dollars."

Metheny and Carson's maintenance director, Levi Phillips, were each sentenced to prison in 2015 for altering helicopter data submitted to the U.S. Forest Service, leading to a situation in which an over-capacity Sikorsky S-61N helicopter lost control with nine souls on board in the Trinity Alps Wilderness Area. Seven firefighters and two pilots died, making it the [deadliest crash](#) involving working firefighters in U.S. history, according to earlier news reports .

[Phillips was sentenced](#) to two years in prison for mail and wire fraud in 2015 .

Court records show Phillips wasn't ordered to pay any restitution. Metheny claims that he sought a similar dollar cap as his co-conspirator, but his lawyer "specifically advised" him not to include so much as a \$1 cap in his plea agreement.

Noting the "sparse nature" of Metheny's allegations and his "late-filed affidavit," U.S. District Judge Ann Aiken ordered the government to respond to Metheny's claims by the first week of June, court records show.

Reach reporter Nick Morgan at 541-776-4471 or

nmorgan@rosebudmedia.com. Follow him on Twitter @[MTCrimeBeat](#).