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Woman may have defrauded 80 people

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A Salinas woman accused of stealing several thousand dollars by posing as a real estate agent and mortgage broker may have victimized people beyond Monterey County, according to Salinas police. A review of documents seized from Blanca Maciel Sanchez, 37, has revealed that there are possibly as many as 80 potential victims, some who may live in the Los Banos and Visalia areas, police spokesman Lalo Villegas said.

The documents, held in 24 boxes, were seized as evidence after Sanchez was arrested Dec. 6. Police say a fraud investigation was launched after two people reported their home was foreclosed on despite having paid Sanchez to help with a mortgage loan modification for lower monthly payments. State law prohibits charging or collecting fees in advance for loan modification services.

The victims were led on for several months and only discovered Sanchez was a fraud after their homes were foreclosed on and they were evicted, according to police.

To lure her victims, Sanchez allegedly represented herself as a real estate agent, mortgage broker and certified public accountant, which police say she is not.

Most of Sanchez's business deals took place at her home in the 1900 block of Arcadia Court using the business names Maciel Financial Services and First Continental Mortgage, Villegas said. Some documents seized from her date back to 2007, he said.

Investigators have not contacted all of the people identified in the documents to learn what dealings they had with Sanchez because some of the files have limited information.

In some instances officers have found just a name and Social Security, number, Villegas said. Sanchez is charged with two counts of embezzlement, two counts of grand theft, possession of a fraudulent check and possession of methamphetamine, all felonies.

She has pleaded not guilty and was released on bail.

Her next court appearance is scheduled for Tuesday.

Deputy District Attorney Todd Hornik said Thursday he plans to ask the judge to review Sanchez's release and require her to disclose the source of the bail money.

Police say they have, so far, identified eight people who accuse Sanchez of fraud.

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Hornik said Sanchez is suspected of stealing about \$50,000 but the investigation is continuing.

The preliminary figure doesn't include secondary losses that victims suffered as a result of the fraud, including costs for rent or ruined credit because of foreclosure.

"There is a lot of collateral damage," he said.

Prosecutors are in negotiations with Sanchez's attorney, Brian Worthington of Salinas, in hopes of reaching a resolution that will include restitution for the victims, Hornik said.

Worthington could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Police ask anyone who went to Sanchez for help with a mortgage loan modification to call 758-7226.