

\$8 million award prompts Chipotle to settle

The verdict grabbed the attention of company executives: The Chipotle restaurant chain quickly tendered a settlement offer when a California jury awarded almost \$8 million to a former manager.

The woman, who had worked at Chipotle for 14 years, claimed she had been fired in retaliation for filing a workers' compensation claim. The chain said she was terminated for stealing—and had video evidence to prove it.

The story began when the manager developed work-related carpal tunnel syndrome. She needed medical leave to deal with the symptoms, so she filed for workers' comp benefits.

Her bosses urged the woman to downplay how much pain she was in when she met with the WC health care provider. She refused.

Then while she was out on medical leave, Chipotle said it had surveillance video showing she had stolen \$636 from the store safe. She was fired and filed a lawsuit.

Chipotle offered \$1,000 to resolve the dispute, but she refused. At trial, the company offered a murky defense, but insisted the video proved the woman's guilt. However, under cross examination, Chipotle couldn't produce the video. Apparently, it had been destroyed.

That made it easy for the jury to conclude the former manager had been fired for filing a workers' comp claim. It took just four hours to decide to award her \$7.97 million in compensatory damages. Before the jury could reconvene to calculate punitive damages, Chipotle settled for an undisclosed amount.