

- home
- more stories
- fact files
- fair go
- story contacts
- meet the team
- library search
- contact us
- join AOL
- help

Search

**Sexy singles waiting.**



I AM    
SEEKING

## Spying on your sickies

REPORTER: Michelle Tapper  
BROADCAST DATE: February 23, 2004



The high rate of sickies has employers worried.

**Half the Australian workforce admits to taking 'sickies' and some employers have begun using private investigators to spy on their employees during sick leave. Privacy groups are concerned.**

Next time you take a fake 'sickie', beware of your employer watching you.

Private investigator Warren Mallard says employers have used his services in the past.

"We have to gather the evidence so that there is no doubt existing in relation to any abuses going on in the workplace," Mr Mallard said.

Sickies are practically an Australian tradition. The latest study shows almost half of Aussie workers admitted to 'faking it'.

Human resources consultant Stephen Walton studied more than 6,000 people's sickies for two years. He says the incidence of sick leave rises on Mondays and Fridays.

"We found that younger people, the under 20s, take more sick leave than any other age group," Mr Walton said.

He says 'doona days' and beach bludgers are costing employers a fortune.

"Absenteeism overall is costing Australian employers about \$7 billion a year," Mr Walton said.

These startling figures mean some employers are taking drastic measures such as spying on serial offenders who call in sick.



Warren Mallard has investigated thousands of government employees over the last 20 years.

"There was endemic abuse of sick leave and they instructed us to undertake surveillance," Mr Mallard said.

"And 98 per cent of the people that we placed under surveillance were defrauding that government department."

A labourer who told his boss he had a bad back was caught on camera lifting a car. At the same time it's alleged he was working as a tree surgeon on the side.

"They physically lifted the car and walked it down the street to get it out of the way of the tree that they were about to fell," Mr Mallard said. "He did all of this while he allegedly had a back injury."

A painter who called in sick with an arm injury was allegedly found brush-in-hand on a roof doing a quick paint job.

But civil libertarian David Bernie says calling in private investigators smacks of Big Brother tactics.

"The idea that your boss can actually watch you when you are at home in the privacy of your home or elsewhere is going too far," Mr Bernie said.

"It strikes us as an overreaction to what is a legitimate problem when people do take sick days when they are not due to have them due to sickness."

Spokesperson for Employer First Gary Brack argues bosses should have a right to investigate serial sickie-takers.

"With the unfair dismissal system working the way it does, employers feel that perhaps they need clear evidence that says the person was cheating on the system," Mr Brack said.

"Somebody can take a paid day off to go and do something else for which they are getting paid, that is fraud - clear-cut fraud - and the person is liable to be terminated if they're caught."

Many of us are leading stressful lives and working longer hours than ever before. Some employees argue it's their right to take a 'mental health day' at the boss's expense.

But they'll have to watch for the hidden cameras.

[back to top](#)

[back to stories](#)