

# Arsonist can sue insurer for claim refusal, Maine judge rules

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ELLSWORTH, Maine (AP) — A Winterport man who pleaded no contest to burning down a house he owned in Orland can sue his insurance company for refusing to pay him for the loss, a judge has ruled.

Merle Crossman, who is serving an 18-month prison term for arson, had filed a civil suit in December 2001 against Middlesex Mutual of Brunswick, which denied his \$75,000 claim.

The insurance company asked Superior Court Justice Andrew Mead to throw out the lawsuit, arguing that Crossman's conviction should bar him from suing.

Mead decided last week, however, that because Crossman's no-contest plea was not an admission of guilt, the suit should proceed.

Crossman, whose trial on the arson charge ended in a hung jury, later pleaded no contest.

Crossman's attorney, Laurie Miller of Bangor, said she was satisfied with Mead's decision. □