Inmates accused in name copyright scheme

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OKLAHOMA CITY -- Forget about digging a hole with a spoon to escape from prison. Four federal inmates are accused of going above and beyond that call.

The four were indicted Tuesday on allegations that they copyrighted their names, then demanded millions of dollars from prison officials for using the names without authorization.

The indictment alleges that inmates Russell Dean Landers, Clayton Heath Albers, Carl Ervin Batts and Barry Dean Bischof sent demand notices for payment to the warden of the El Reno federal prison and filed liens against his property. They then hired someone to seize his vehicles, freeze his bank accounts and change the locks on his house.

Then, believing the warden's property had been seized, the inmates said they wouldn't return his property unless they were released from prison, according to the indictment.

But the person hired by the inmates turned out to be an undercover FBI agent, said U.S. Attorney John C. Richter.

The four men and William Michael Roberson, 50, of Baton Rouge, La., were indicted on accusations of conspiring to impede the duties of federal prison officials, Richter said. Roberson is accused of assisting the four inmates in the scheme, which allegedly took place in late 2003 and early 2004.

All five were also indicted on charges of mailing threatening communications with the intent to extort.

The conspiracy count carries a maximum penalty of six years in prison and a $250,000 fine. The mail charge is punishable by up to 10 years in prison and a $250,000 fine.

It was unclear whether those indicted Tuesday had attorneys.