

IT'S JAIL TIME FOR ARSONIST WHOSE LAWYER'S PANTS CAUGHT ON FIRE

Miami Herald

May 12, 2017 3:25 PM

By David Ovalle

A Miami arsonist is going to jail for 364 days – two months after his attorney's pants bizarrely caught fire during trial.

Claudy Charles — whose lawyer ignited wide media interest in an otherwise obscure case — agreed to a plea deal this week that includes five years of probation.

He accepted the plea deal after Miami-Dade prosecutors agreed he deserved a new trial following the hot-pants fiasco and his conviction at trial in March.

His former attorney, Stephen Gutierrez, remains under law-enforcement scrutiny as investigators try to determine whether the blaze was a planned stunt for the jury — or truly a remarkable coincidence.

It was on March 8 that Gutierrez was delivering his final argument in Miami-Dade criminal court, arguing that Charles' car combusted spontaneously, and was not intentionally set ablaze for the insurance money.

Just as Gutierrez began his closing arguments, witnesses reported that he was fiddling with his pocket when smoke began billowing from his right pants pocket. Before stunned onlookers and jurors, Gutierrez rushed out of the courtroom to the bathroom to douse the flaming battery with water.

Gutierrez, his pants singed, was eventually allowed to finish his arguments. Jurors convicted his client anyway.

The 28-year-old lawyer blamed a faulty electronic cigarette battery. Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Michael Hanzman was skeptical, saying he thought it was "highly improbable." In the wake of mocking headlines across the world, Hanzman removed Gutierrez from the case.

Because of the surreal incident, prosecutors agreed Charles should be afforded a new trial. They also extended him the plea deal — the same terms offered before trial. On Thursday, Charles agreed.

SOURCE: Ovalle, D. (2017, May 12). It's jail time for arsonist whose lawyer's pants caught on fire. Miami Herald. Retrieved from <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/article150212372.html>