



Department of Justice

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THREE PLEAD GUILTY IN SEPARATE CASES OF FEMA FRAUD

In separate cases, three women have pleaded guilty to federal charges for fraud committed in the wakes of Hurricane Ivan and Hurricane Katrina.

On August 11, 2008, Pamela Townsend pleaded guilty before District Judge William H. Steele to making a false claim for FEMA benefits. After Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, Townsend twice filed applications asking FEMA to reimburse her for rent expenses that she had not incurred. Townsend represented to FEMA that she had entered a rent agreement, paid a security deposit, and paid monthly rent of \$500, when she was actually living rent-free with relatives. As a result of her fraudulent claims, Townsend received \$4,360 from FEMA that she was not entitled to.

Rhonda Brown of Saraland, Alabama, and Joli Knight of Loxley, Alabama, also entered guilty pleas to making false claims this morning before Chief Judge Callie V.S. Granade.

As part of her guilty plea, Brown admitted that on September 20, 2005, she sought disaster assistance from FEMA claiming that her primary residence – a trailer in Coden, Alabama – had been destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. The application was false; Brown actually lived and had lived for years at a house in Saraland, Alabama, when Hurricane

Katrina struck. Although Brown owned the dilapidated trailer in Coden, no one lived there. Brown ultimately used the \$21,203.82 she received from FEMA to buy a new vehicle.

Joli A. Knight admitted in her guilty plea that she filed a false claim for disaster assistance after Hurricane Ivan in 2004, seeking assistance for repairs to a trailer that Knight did not own. Knight received a total of \$8,736.81 from FEMA to which she was not entitled. This was not the only fraud associated with the trailer in Loxley. Knight's daughter, Nicole Cline-Ikerd committed a similar fraud after Hurricane Katrina, receiving \$7,960.55 by falsely claiming to own the same trailer. Cline-Ikerd was indicted separately and pleaded guilty to a false claims charge in federal court on July 16, 2008.

This case was investigated by the Department of Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General. It was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney D. Andrew Sigler.

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