



**U. S. Department of Justice  
U. S. Attorney's Office  
Southern District of Texas**  
*Chuck Rosenberg • United States Attorney*

---

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

Date: January 19, 2006

Nancy G. Herrera  
Executive Assistant U. S. Attorney  
Phone: 713/567-9301 Fax: 713/718-3390  
or  
John Yembrick  
Public Affairs Specialist  
Phone: 713/567-9388 Fax: 713/718-3389  
E-Mail: [usatty.txs@usdoj.gov](mailto:usatty.txs@usdoj.gov)  
Website: [www.usdoj.gov/usao/txs](http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/txs)

**HOUSTON WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO DEFRAUDING FEMA OF HURRICANE  
KATRINA DISASTER FUNDS**

(HOUSTON, TX) United States Attorney Chuck Rosenberg announced today that LaToya Harris, 33, of Houston, Texas, has been convicted of filing a false claim with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for Hurricane Katrina Disaster funds.

At a hearing held on yesterday, January 18, 2006, before United States District Judge Nancy Atlas, Harris pleaded guilty to the federal felony charge of filing a false claim in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 287. Judge Atlas scheduled Harris's sentencing for April 6, 2006. At sentencing, Harris faces a maximum punishment of five years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine.

Harris's conviction is the result of an investigation initiated by the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS OIG) following receipt of information from a Houston area resident. A search of FEMA records revealed that on September 18, 2005, Harris placed a telephone call to FEMA to file a claim for disaster assistance. Harris identified Hurricane Katrina as the basis for her claim and stated that her primary residence when Katrina struck was in Biloxi, Mississippi. Harris also stated in her claim that Hurricane Katrina left her with essential needs for food, shelter, and clothing. As a result of that claim, FEMA disbursed \$2,000 in expedited assistance to Harris.

Investigation by the DHS OIG revealed that Harris was actually living in Houston and working in Pasadena, Texas, when Hurricane Katrina made landfall in Biloxi. The owner and

#more#

property manager for the Biloxi address Harris provided in her FEMA claim had never heard of Harris. Harris is listed on a lease signed in July 2004 for an apartment in Houston and the manager of that apartment complex stated that Harris has resided at that apartment continuously since July 2004. Timesheets from Harris's employer in Pasadena show that she was working in Pasadena the day Hurricane Katrina made landfall in Biloxi. After her arrest on October 19, Harris provided a written statement in which she admitted she lived in Houston and was working in Pasadena when Hurricane Katrina struck.

The United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Texas is a member of the Department of Justice's Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, created by Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales to deter, detect and prosecute unscrupulous individuals who try to take advantage of the Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita disasters. Headed by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher, the Task Force is comprised of federal, state, and local law enforcement investigating agencies and the United States Attorney's Offices in the Gulf Coast region and nationwide. This matter was investigated by the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General and prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Gregg Costa.

###