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## FEMA FRAUD INDICTMENT RESULTS IN GUILTY PLEA

### *Ferriday woman fraudulently obtains FEMA relief funds*

**Shreveport, Louisiana** . . . A Ferriday, Louisiana woman who befriended an evacuee at one of the rescue shelters following Hurricane Katrina and then stole her FEMA fraud disaster assistance checks pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court, United States Attorney Donald W. Washington announced. **DEBBIE ANDERSON**, age 37, of Ferriday, Louisiana, entered her plea before U.S. District Judge Dee D. Drell in Alexandria, Louisiana.

An indictment was returned in October 2005 charging ANDERSON with conspiracy, theft of mail matter, and theft of public money. Testimony at today's hearing revealed that ANDERSON met an evacuee at a rescue shelter following Hurricane Katrina and gave that individual permission to use ANDERSON's address to receive their mail. When an express mail package arrived at ANDERSON's

residence addressed to the evacuee, ANDERSON signed for the mail with a fictitious name and opened the mail, which contained two FEMA disaster assistance checks which were intended for the evacuee. ANDERSON took the checks and went to a local car dealership and persuaded the salesman to allow her to use one of the checks to purchase a car. ANDERSON took the other check to a bank in Jonesville, Louisiana and persuaded the teller to cash the check for her because she had no identification. The total amount of the checks was \$4,358.

ANDERSON faces a sentence of up to five years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both. Sentencing in federal court is determined by the discretion of federal judges and the governing statute. United States Sentencing Guidelines established by the United States Congress and the United States Sentencing Commission are only used as guidelines by the judge in determining the appropriate sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Alexander C. Van Hook and was a joint investigation by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Alexandria Resident Agency.

To date, 19 defendants have been charged with violations related to FEMA relief funds, and more than 100 FEMA fraud investigations are on-going in the Western District of Louisiana.

In September 2005, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales created the

Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, designed to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud, identity theft, procurement fraud and insurance fraud. The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force - chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division - includes members from the FBI, the Federal Trade Commission, the Postal Inspector's Office, and the Executive Office for United States Attorneys, among others.

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