



# Department of Justice

United States Attorney Deborah J. Rhodes  
Southern District of Alabama

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CONTACT: CHARLIE McNICHOL  
PHONE: (251) 415-7131  
FAX: (251) 441-5277

**ALABAMA RESIDENT PLEADS GUILTY TO DEFRAUDING FEMA OF  
\$277,377 AND AGGRAVATED IDENTITY THEFT**

MOBILE, AL-- Lawanda T. Williams, also known as Lawanda Johnson, pled guilty today to defrauding the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) of more than \$277,000 and aggravated identity theft following Hurricane Katrina, United States Attorney Deborah J. Rhodes of the Southern District of Alabama announced.

Williams pled guilty to making false claims to the government, wire fraud, and aggravated identity theft in connection with twenty-eight fraudulent claims for disaster assistance she made to FEMA after Katrina. Williams admitted that her residence in Jackson, Alabama was not damaged by the hurricane and that she filed twenty-eight fraudulent claims for assistance, falsely claiming to have lived at various addresses in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Florida. In those applications, Williams admitted using Social Security numbers of other people and providing FEMA with fraudulent and fictitious documents that purported to prove her ownership of property she did not own.

Twenty of the applications Williams filed were approved for payment in the amount of \$277,377.15, and Williams admitted receiving the proceeds of the fraud through the mail and through direct deposit into her bank account. With the money from FEMA, Williams admitted purchasing real estate, a mobile home, several vehicles, home electronics, home furnishings, and other goods and services. As part of her plea agreement, Williams has agreed to forfeit to the United States the property she obtained with the FEMA money. Williams also agreed to pay full restitution for the money she received by fraud.

“People in the Southern District of Alabama suffered as a result of Hurricane Katrina, and while it is unfortunate that some of them took advantage of the help and assistance offered after the storm, the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force is continuing to bring to justice the criminals who sought to unlawfully profit from the situation,” said Rhodes. “We will aggressively investigate and prosecute those people who profited

fraudulently from the recovery efforts.”

Chief United States District Judge Callie V. S. Granade set Williams’ sentencing for January 24, 2007. Williams faces a maximum penalty of twenty years’ imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine for wire fraud; five years’ imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine for making false claims to the government; and two years’ mandatory imprisonment, consecutive to any other term of imprisonment, and a \$250,000 fine for aggravated identity theft.

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 the FBI, the U.S. Inspectors General community, the U.S. Secret Service, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Executive Office for United States Attorneys, and others.

The case was investigated by the Department of Homeland Security, Office of the Inspector General, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States Postal Inspection Service. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Sean Costello.

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