



Department of Justice

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ANOTHER PLEADS GUILTY IN BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA, ON FEDERAL FRAUD CHARGE

BATON ROUGE, LA – Another Louisiana resident pled guilty in federal court on a charge of fraud related to hurricane disaster relief programs, United States Attorney David R. Dugas announced today.

ROBIN BECNEL, age 44, of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, pled guilty today before U.S. District Court Judge Ralph E. Tyson to an indictment charging her with illegal conversion of government property, that is, a check from FEMA for expedited disaster assistance. The case was investigated by the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General. As a result of her guilty plea to the indictment, BECNEL faces a maximum sentence of ten (10) years imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, or both.

The number of individuals who have been charged in the Middle District of Louisiana with violations related to hurricane disaster relief funds stands at eighty-one.

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.

For further information, contact David R. Dugas, U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Louisiana, or Lyman Thornton, First Assistant U.S. Attorney, at (225) 389-0443. Anyone suspecting criminal activity involving disaster assistance programs can make an anonymous report by calling the toll-free Hurricane Relief Fraud Hotline, 1-866-720-5721, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, until further notice. Information can also be emailed to the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force at HKFTF@leo.gov or sent by surface mail, with as many details as possible, to Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-4909.

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