



Department of Justice

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THREE ARRESTED FOR THEFT OF GOVERNMENT PROPERTY IN BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

BATON ROUGE, LA – BYRON T. BASIL, age 29, of Plaquemine, Louisiana; BYRON W. HARDESTY, age 37, of Baker, Louisiana; and LEROY THOMAS, JR., age 37, of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, were arrested by federal agents yesterday on charges of theft of government property, United States Attorney David R. Dugas announced. A criminal complaint was signed this afternoon by U.S. District Court Magistrate Judge Stephen C. Riedlinger.

The complaint alleges that BASIL and THOMAS were employees of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and that HARDESTY was a former FEMA employee. BASIL and THOMAS allegedly worked at the staging area of a FEMA storage site in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. All three defendants allegedly had access to the site and travel trailers with crated air conditioning units that were stored there. The complaint alleges that BASIL, THOMAS, and HARDESTY were involved in a scheme involving the unauthorized taking of air conditioning units from the FEMA storage site. The men were arrested after they attempted to sell several of the air conditioning units for a fraction of their value to a Special Agent with the Inspector General's Office of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security who was working in an undercover capacity.

U.S. Attorney Dugas said, "The arrests last night were the result of an investigation that started last week and was handled quickly and efficiently by inspectors from the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General and by the East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff's Office. We will review all of the evidence and make charging decisions in accordance with the Attorney General's zero tolerance policy for disaster related fraud."

NOTE: A complaint is merely an accusation by a law enforcement official, and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty at trial.

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