



# Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office  
Southern District of Texas

Donald J. DeGabrielle • United States Attorney

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<b>FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE</b>	<b>ANGELA DODGE</b>
<b>WEDNESDAY, OCT. 1, 2008</b>	<b>PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER</b>
<b>WWW.USDOJ.GOV/USAO/TXS</b>	<b>713-567-9388</b>

## **HOUSTON WOMAN CONVICTED OF DEFRAUDING FEMA AFTER BENCH TRIAL**

(HOUSTON, Texas) - Belinda Gayle Nordstrom, 33, of Houston, has been convicted of filing a fraudulent claim with FEMA for Hurricane Rita disaster assistance, United States Attorney Donald J. DeGabrielle Jr. announced today.

Nordstrom was found guilty of the federal fraud offense following a bench trial before U.S. District Judge Kenneth Hoyt. Nordstrom filed a claim with FEMA in 2005 for hurricane disaster assistance claiming her primary residence was damaged during Hurricane Rita in 2005. The United States proved that Nordstrom was claiming assistance for a vacation home located in Point Blank, Texas. Her primary residence in Houston was not damaged by the 2005 Hurricane. FEMA assistance can only be applied to help recover for harm to an applicant's primary residence and cannot be sought to address damages to property that in this case was not a primary residence.

Nordstrom faces a maximum of five years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine and up to a three-year-term of supervised release at sentencing which has been set by Judge Hoyt for Dec. 29, 2008. Additionally, the United States will seek restitution in the amount of \$2,000 the amount received as a result of the false claim.

Nordstrom will be permitted to remain free on bond pending her sentencing hearing.

This case was investigated by the United States Postal Investigation Service with assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Bertram Isaacs.

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 to deter, detect and prosecute unscrupulous individuals who try to take advantage of the Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita disasters. 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.

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 or contacting the Disaster Fraud Fax at 1-225-334-4707 or the Disaster Fraud e-mail at [disaster@leo.gov](mailto:disaster@leo.gov), 24 hours a day, seven days a week until further notice. Information can also be e-mailed to the inspector general at [dhsoline@dhs.gov](mailto:dhsoline@dhs.gov) or sent by surface mail, with as many details as possible, to:

National Center for Disaster Fraud  
Baton Rouge, LA 70821-4909

or

Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC. 20528  
Attn: Office of Inspector General, Hotline

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