



U. S. Department of Justice
U. S. Attorney's Office
Southern District of Texas
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

DATE: March 8, 2006

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**FOUR MORE TEXANS INDICTED FOR FILING FALSE CLAIMS WITH FEMA FOR
HURRICANE DISASTER FUNDS**

(HOUSTON, TX) Four Texans were indicted for filing false claims to obtain Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) disaster relief assistance. United States Attorney Chuck Rosenberg reported that the filing of criminal charges in these cases brings the total to 13 persons charged in the Southern District of Texas with fraud in connection with FEMA hurricane disaster relief programs.

On Wednesday, March 1, 2006, a Houston grand jury returned four indictments each charging an individual with a single count of filing a false claim with FEMA. On Monday, March 6, 2006, Wardell Reddish, 30, Michael Barnes, 20, and Ebonee Lagard, 22, all of Houston, were arrested by special agents and officers of the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General and of the Federal Protective Service. A warrant has issued for the arrest of the fourth defendant charged, David Mosley, 48, of Bedias, Texas.

In response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, FEMA provided eligible households with an expedited payment of \$2,000 to assist victims with immediate food, shelter and clothing needs, with additional rental assistance payments to be made over time. To qualify for FEMA assistance based on housing needs, the damaged home in the disaster area must be where the applicant usually lives and where the applicant was residing at the time of the disaster.

In each of the four cases, the defendant is accused of submitting a claim with FEMA for Hurricane Katrina disaster relief benefits in September 2005, each falsely claiming to have permanently resided in Gretna, New Orleans, or Violet, Louisiana, at the time Hurricane Katrina struck in late August 2005.

The indictment against Reddish alleges that in his September 16, 2005, claim for assistance, Reddish falsely claimed that Hurricane Katrina had affected his business or rental property and he had lost work.

In his claim for hurricane assistance filed on September 15, 2005, Barnes is alleged to have falsely claimed he needed food, shelter and clothing and had lost work or become unemployed as a result of Hurricane Katrina.

Lagard is accused of falsely claiming she had suffered damage to her personal property as a result of Hurricane Katrina in her claim filed on September 17, 2005.

Last, the indictment charging Mosely alleges his claim of September 21, 2005, falsely asserted his need for food, shelter and clothing due to the Hurricane.

Filing a false claim with FEMA for hurricane disaster relief carries a statutory punishment range of up to 5 years imprisonment, without parole, and a fine of up to \$250,000 upon conviction.

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 by Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales to deter, detect and prosecute unscrupulous individuals who try to take advantage of the Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita disasters. Headed by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher, 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.

These cases are the result of the continuing investigations being conducted by Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General and will be prosecuted by Special Assistant United States Attorney Jason Varnado.

An indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence. The public is reminded that a defendant is presumed innocent unless and until convicted through due process of law. The United States always bears the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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 inspector general at dhsorghotline@dhs.gov or sent by surface mail, with as many details as possible, to:

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

The Department of Justice Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force and Federal Trade Commission Consumer Response Center will also accept disaster fraud information. To provide information to the Justice Department, access the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center at www.ic3.gov. The Federal Trade Commission accepts disaster fraud information on its toll-free line, 1-877-382-4357, or TTY 202-326-2502 for persons with speech or hearing impairment.

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