



Department of Justice

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

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TEN MORE CHARGED WITH FILING FRAUDULENT FEMA CLAIMS

New charges brings to 72 the number of persons charged with Katrina and Rita Fraud in SDTX

(HOUSTON, Texas) - In two separate cases, a total of ten individuals have been charged with fraudulently filing FEMA claims for Hurricane Katrina and Rita disaster assistance, United States Attorney Don DeGabrielle announced today.

Devin I. Poindexter, 25, Skie Rainey, 30, Christopher E. Jones, 25, Joseph E. Wilson, 22, and Lelund D. Marzell, 21, were indicted by a grand jury Feb. 14, 2008, for mail fraud and conspiracy. The case was unsealed March 7 after Rainey made his initial appearance in federal court in Houston March 5 and was released on bond. Poindexter, Jones, Wilson and Marzell are all still at large and warrants for their arrest have issued. Anyone having information about the whereabouts of Poindexter, Jones, Wilson or Marzell are asked to contact the Houston office of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service at 713-238-4400 or the Department of Homeland Security - Office of Inspector General Hurricane Relief Fraud Hotline at their toll free number listed below.

The indictment charges that after Hurricane Katrina, the defendants moved to Houston from New Orleans. While in Houston, the defendants submitted multiple claims for Rita benefits, falsely listing damaged addresses in Beaumont, Texas, as their primary residences. The indictment further alleges that each of the claims use the same first and last name as one of the defendants, but list a social security number belonging to an individual who had no knowledge of the scheme. All of the claims list the same current address at a Motel 6 in Houston. In total, the

defendants submitted at least 22 false claims, and, as a result, caused FEMA to send checks to the Motel 6 which were then cashed by the defendants.

In the other case, a federal grand jury returned an indictment Jan. 17, 2008, against Rhonda Stykes, 42, Kevin Colbert, 23, James Lee Martin, 57, Alexis Nicole Hines, 22, and Jesse L. Smith, 57. All five defendants have made their initial appearances in federal court in Houston during the last month. Stykes, Colbert, Martin and Hines were released on bond. Smith remains in state custody, where he has been serving a sentence on an unrelated charge.

The indictment charges Stykes with five counts of mail fraud and the other four defendants with one count each of mail fraud in connection with the fraudulent filing of FEMA claims. According to the indictment, Stykes filed fraudulent FEMA claims in her name and the names of friends and relatives, including Martin, Hines and Smith after those individuals provided Stykes with their identification. Stykes assisted others, such as Colbert, in the filing of fraudulent FEMA claims by providing them with addresses in New Orleans they could use in filing their own claims. The indictment alleges some of the addresses used in the claims filed by Stykes and her associates do not even exist and that Stykes had most of the FEMA checks sent to her Houston home. After receiving the checks, Stykes gave them to the listed applicant and accompanied the applicant to the store where the checks were cashed and the proceeds split between Stykes and the person listed in the application.

The mail fraud charges in the Stykes and Poindexter cases carry a statutory maximum punishment of 20 years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$250,000. The conspiracy charge in the Poindexter case carries a maximum punishment of five years and a fine of up to \$250,000.

With the return of these indictments, a total of 72 individuals have been charged in the Southern District of Texas with fraud relating to Hurricane Katrina or Rita.

The United States Postal Inspection Service investigated these cases with assistance from the Department of Homeland Security - Office of Inspector General. The Stykes case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Gregg Costa, while the Poindexter case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Ryan D. McConnell.

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 the Attorney General of the United States to deter, detect and prosecute unscrupulous individuals who try to take advantage of the Hurricane Katrina and 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.

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 e-mailed 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

An indictment or superseding indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence. A defendant is presumed innocent unless and until convicted through due process of law.

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Jones.jpg



Marzell.jpg



Wilson.jpg



Poindexter.jpg