



Department of Justice

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TWO HOUSTON RESIDENTS CHARGED WITH FILING MULTIPLE FALSE CLAIMS FOR FEMA ASSISTANCE

HOUSTON – Two Houston residents, Curtis Caldwell, 28, and Ernest Tutt Jr., 22, have been indicted with fraudulently obtaining thousands of dollars in FEMA Hurricane Katrina and Rita disaster assistance, U.S. Attorney Donald J. DeGabrielle Jr. announced today. Special agents of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General, and the Social Security Administration's Office of Inspector General arrested Caldwell and Tutt today at their residence in Houston. Both men appeared before U.S. Magistrate Judge Mary Milloy today and are scheduled to appear again tomorrow at 11:30 a.m. for a bond hearing.

The indictment returned against Caldwell on Aug. 16, 2006, accuses him of filing 22 separate applications with FEMA for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita disaster assistance between Sept. 11, 2005, and Oct. 27, 2005, falsely listing primary residences in New Orleans and Lake Charles, even though Caldwell was residing in Houston before, during and after the hurricanes. The indictment further alleges Caldwell used his own name and Social Security number in the first application he filed, but in the remaining claims used a variation of his actual name (such as using a different middle initial) and Social Security numbers belonging to other individuals. Caldwell is charged with 14 counts of mail fraud based on the 14 checks that FEMA mailed to him as a result of the false applications he allegedly filed. Additionally, Caldwell is charged with three counts of aggravated identity theft based on his alleged unauthorized use of others' Social Security numbers during the commission of his mail fraud scheme. The indictment seeks a judgment ordering Caldwell to forfeit the \$28,000 he allegedly obtained by fraud from FEMA.

Tutt, charged in a separate indictment also returned on Aug. 16, 2006, is charged with filing 17 separate applications between Sept. 12, 2005, and Oct. 27, 2005, with FEMA for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita disaster assistance listing primary residences in New Orleans and Lake Charles, even though Tutt was residing in Houston before, during and after the hurricanes. The indictment further alleges that Tutt used his own name and social security number in the first application he filed, but in the remaining claims used a variation of his actual name (such as using a different middle initial) and Social Security numbers belonging to other individuals. Tutt is charged with 10 counts of mail fraud based on the 10 checks FEMA mailed to him as a result of the false applications he allegedly filed. Tutt is also charged with three counts of aggravated identity theft based on his alleged unauthorized use of others' Social Security numbers during the commission of his mail fraud scheme. The indictment seeks a judgment ordering Tutt to forfeit the \$20,358 Tutt allegedly obtain by fraud from FEMA.

Each mail fraud count carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison without parole and a \$250,000 fine upon conviction. Each aggravated identity theft count carries a mandatory consecutive sentence of two years in prison.

With the return of these two indictments, a total of 28 individuals have been charged in the Southern District of Texas with fraud relating to Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Rita.

The U.S. 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 U.S. Attorney's Offices in the Gulf Coast region and nationwide.

This case was investigated by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, with assistance from the Department of Homeland's Security Office of Inspector General, the Social Security Administration's Office of Inspector General and the Small Business Administration's Office of Inspector General. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Gregg Costa.

Anyone suspecting criminal activity involving disaster assistance programs can make an anonymous report by calling the toll-free Hurricane Relief Fraud Hotline at 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

An 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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