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**FOUR DEFENDANTS CHARGED WITH DEFRAUDING FEMA**

BIRMINGHAM, AL - Four defendants have been indicted by a federal grand jury today for defrauding and filing false claims with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). In response to Hurricane Katrina, FEMA has made available to eligible households \$2,000 in expedited disaster assistance to be followed by additional funds if needed. The expedited disaster assistance is intended to help Katrina evacuees with immediate food, shelter, and clothing needs. To be eligible 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.

According to U.S. Attorney Alice H. Martin the following individuals were indicted:

ANGIE LANORA HARRIS, 37, of Etowah County was charged with one count of making false statements/claim and one count of theft of government money.

THERESA GASKEY CLARK, A/K/A/ THERESA HARRIS 35, of Etowah County is charged with one count of making false claim. Harris and Clark made application for FEMA funds using fake Louisiana Identifications and false Louisiana addresses in September of 2005 Harris used the internet to apply and receive funds.

Both women claimed to have suffered disaster-related damage to their home in Slidell when in fact they were residents of Alabama.

PHYLLIS RATLIFF, A/K/A PHYLLIS WASHINGTON, 45, of Tuscaloosa County, was charged with one count of mail fraud and two counts of making false claims in September of 2005. Ratliff, was assisted by private citizens, church volunteers and the Red Cross while posing as a Hurricane evacuee. While staying at a shelter she applied for FEMA assistance using false information. After receiving funds and attempting to cash the check the fraud was discovered.

A fourth individual, a white male age 26 from Walker County, whose name is withheld pending service of outstanding warrants was charged in a two count indictment with making a false claim and mail fraud in September of 2005. He claimed to be a resident of New Orleans when in fact he was a resident of Jasper, Alabama.

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"Hurricane Katrina disaster relief is only for people who lived in the disaster areas. These fraudsters tried to get quick, easy money at the expense of real victims and honest taxpayers. Law enforcement will not let that happen," said U. S. Attorney Alice H. Martin. "Don't assume that because it is convenient to 'sign up' for disaster relief that law enforcement isn't monitoring these applications to ensure that taxpayer money is going into true victims' hands. We are, and you will be discovered. "

"The FBI is committed to aggressively investigating complaints of fraud related to Hurricane Katrina. We are working vigorously with our law enforcement partners in the community to bring these violators to justice," said Carmen S. Adams, Special Agent in Charge, FBI Birmingham.

Maximum sentence for filing false statements is five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Maximum sentence for theft of government funds is ten years in prison and \$250,000 fine.

Hurricane Katrina has affected the nation in many ways. In September 2005, United States Attorney General Alberto Gonzales created the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force. The Task Force's mission is to deter, detect, and prosecute unscrupulous individuals who seek to profit unjustly from the Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita disasters.

Special Agents of the Office of Inspector General, United States Department of Homeland Security and the following agencies worked together during the investigation of these cases:

- Federal Bureau of Investigation
- Alabama Attorney General's Office
- Tuscaloosa County Sheriff's Office
- Jasper Police Department
- Northport Police Department
- Attalla Police Department

Members of the public with information indicating fraudulent activity relating to hurricane relief, are urged to contact law enforcement.

Members of the public are reminded that the indictment contains only charges. A defendant is presumed innocent of the charges and it will be the government's burden to prove a defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.

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