



The United States Attorney's Office

## Central District of California



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### **MAN GUILTY OF CHARGES IN \$5 MILLION INVESTMENT SCAM THAT BILKED VICTIMS FROM ACROSS U.S. AND SWITZERLAND**

A transient was convicted today on fraud and money laundering charges for running a scheme that bilked several victims out of more than \$5 million with promises of huge returns on their investments that they thought were being used to make "bridge loans" or to invest in projects such as a waste-treatment plant in New Jersey.

Steven M. Ferguson, 52, who formerly resided in Marina Del Rey and Las Vegas, Nevada, was found guilty by a federal jury of 23 felony counts, including mail fraud and money laundering.

The evidence presented during a two-week trial showed that Ferguson solicited money from investors by posing as a successful businessman and promising that investments would yield large returns. However, instead of investing any of the money, Ferguson used most of the investors' money to pay for his lavish lifestyle, which included part ownership of a Lear jet, golf trips to Pebble Beach, luxury homes, private chefs and meals at the finest restaurants in Southern California. Ferguson attempted to shield himself from detection by setting up a series of shell companies and obtaining credit in the names of his victims, including an employee and a consultant.

The fraud scheme was run out of a Beverly Hills shell company called Global Venture Group and, prior to that, a company called Environmental Technologies International Holdings. Ferguson also allegedly used an entity known as S.M. Ferguson & Associates.

One victim who testified at trial believed that Ferguson was part of an investment club in which members received 50 percent interest on their investments. After retiring and cashing in his retirement account, the victim gave money to Ferguson and was lulled into believing he had invested in a legitimate business opportunity when Ferguson made some payments. However, after giving Ferguson all of the funds in his retirement account – nearly \$400,000 – he was unable to get his money back. Ferguson used this money to, among other things, pay more than \$250,000 toward a house at a private golf club in Georgia.

Ferguson was also found guilty of causing a girlfriend to lie in a lawsuit in federal court in Los Angeles for the purpose of preventing the United States government from recovering a Las Vegas home purchased by Ferguson with victim proceeds. The female friend was asked by Ferguson to falsely claim that she owned the Las Vegas home.