



U.S. Department of Justice
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District of New Mexico

PRESS RELEASE

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**RATON, N.M. MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO STEALING WORKERS'
COMPENSATION BENEFITS INTENDED FOR HIS MOTHER**

ALBUQUERQUE -- This morning, **Michael T. Merkel**, 59, of Raton, N.M., entered a guilty plea to an information charging him with theft of government property under a plea agreement with the U.S. Attorney's Office. If the federal court accepts the terms of the plea agreement, Merkel will be sentenced to probation. The plea agreement requires Merkel to pay \$43,433.88 in restitution to the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL), Division of Federal Employees' Compensation, Office of Workers' Compensation Programs.

U.S. Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales said that the criminal charge against Merkel stemmed from a 15-month course of unlawful conduct pursuant to which Merkel defrauded the DOL's Office of Workers' Compensation Programs by converted to his own use workers' compensation benefits intended for his mother. Merkel originally was charged with theft of government property in a 17- count indictment filed on September 27, 2011, which alleged that Merkel defrauded the government an aggregate of \$43,433.88 in workers' compensation benefits between March 2008 and June 2009.

In his plea agreement, Merkel admitted that, from March 2008 through June 2009, he intentionally defrauded the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs of \$43,433.88 in Workers' Compensation benefits intended for his mother, Catherine Merkel, after she died in February 2008. Under the terms of the plea agreement, the United States will move to dismiss the indictment after Merkel is sentenced.

The case was investigated by the U.S. Department of Labor-OIG, Office of Labor Racketeering and Fraud, and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Kimberly A. Brawley.

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