

Press Release:

3 December FEMA Fraud - Two more Plead Guilty

ANOTHER PLEADS GUILTY IN BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA, ON DISASTER RELIEF FRAUD CHARGES

BATON ROUGE, LA – United States Attorney David R. Dugas announced that another Louisiana resident pled guilty in federal court yesterday to a charge of mail fraud related to a hurricane disaster relief program.

TYLISHA D. BARNHILL, age 23, of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, pled guilty yesterday before U.S. District Court Judge John V. Parker to Count One of an indictment charging her with mail fraud. The stipulated factual basis contained in the plea agreement states that BARNHILL caused a false and fraudulent application to be filed for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) benefits in which she falsely claimed to have been living in New Orleans at the time of Hurricane Katrina. The stipulated factual basis also stated that when contacted by FEMA regarding her application, BARNHILL created and submitted fraudulent documents to FEMA in an effort to conceal her fraud. The case was investigated by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General. As a result of her guilty plea to Count One, BARNHILL faces a maximum sentence of twenty (20) years imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, or both. The U.S. Attorney's Office will dismiss Counts Two and Three of the indictment when BARNHILL is sentenced on Count One.

JESSICA D. CAVALIER, age 27, of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, pled guilty yesterday before U.S. District Court Judge John V. Parker to Count One of an indictment charging her with mail fraud. The stipulated factual basis contained in the plea agreement states that CAVALIER filed a false and fraudulent application for FEMA benefits in which she falsely claimed that she was living in New Orleans at the time of Hurricane Katrina and that Hurricane Katrina caused damage to her home and personal property. The case was investigated by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General. As a result of her guilty plea to Count One, CAVALIER faces a maximum sentence of twenty (20) years imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, or both. The U.S. Attorney's Office will dismiss Count Two of the indictment when CAVALIER is sentenced on Count One.

The number of individuals who have been charged in the Middle District of Louisiana with violations related to hurricane disaster relief funds stands at one hundred sixty-five. In September 2005, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales created the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, designed to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud, identity theft, procurement fraud and insurance fraud. The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force – chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division – includes the FBI, the U.S. Inspectors General community, the U.S. Secret Service, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Executive Office for United States Attorneys and others.