



# Department of Justice

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## **FORMER OWNER OF AIRLINE SERVICES COMPANY PLEADS GUILTY IN SCHEME TO DEFRAUD ILLINOIS-BASED RYAN INTERNATIONAL AIRLINES**

WASHINGTON – A former owner and operator of a Florida-based airline services company pleaded guilty today in U.S. District Court in West Palm Beach, Fla., to participating in a kickback scheme to defraud Ryan International Airlines, a charter airline company located in Rockford, Ill., the Department of Justice announced.

Robert A. Riddell, the former owner and operator of an airline security and ground services company, pleaded guilty to felony charges filed on Sept. 29, 2011, in U.S. District Court in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. The charges against Riddell stem from a scheme in which he made kickback payments to Wayne E. Kepple, the former vice president of ground operations for Ryan, while also splitting the proceeds of fraudulent invoices with him.

Ryan provides air passenger and cargo services for corporations, private individuals, professional sports teams and the U.S. government, including the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Marshals Service. Riddell's company provided ground security and other ground services coordination for selected Ryan flights in Europe.

According to court documents, Kepple was in charge of contracting with providers of goods and services on behalf of Ryan and approving the invoices submitted by the providers to Ryan for payment. The department said that from March 2006 through at least August 2009, Riddell paid Kepple more than \$330,000 in kickbacks, including payments based on fabricated invoices submitted by Riddell's company to Ryan.

Riddell was charged with one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and honest services fraud, and one count of wire fraud. Each count carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 criminal fine for individuals. The maximum fine may be increased to twice the gain derived from the crime or twice the loss suffered by the victims of the crime, if either amount is greater than the statutory maximum fine.

Today's plea is the third to arise out of the Antitrust Division's ongoing investigation into fraud and anticompetitive conduct in the airline charter services industry. On Aug. 12, 2011, David A. Chaisson and James E. Murphy pleaded guilty to participating in different conspiracies

to defraud Ryan by making kickback payments to Kepple in exchange for winning contracts for their respective companies.

The investigation is being conducted by the Antitrust Division's Atlanta Field Office and the National Criminal Enforcement Section and the U.S. Department of Defense's Office of Inspector General, with assistance from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida. Anyone with information concerning anticompetitive conduct in the airline charter services industry is urged to call the Antitrust Division's Atlanta Field Office at 404-331-7100 or visit [www.justice.gov/atr/contact/newcase.htm](http://www.justice.gov/atr/contact/newcase.htm).

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