Department of Justice

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ANOTHER PLEADS GUILTY IN BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA, TO FEDERAL FRAUD CHARGE

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

MARK A. JOHNSON, age 32, of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, pled guilty today before Chief U.S. District Court Judge Ralph E. Tyson to Count One of an indictment charging him with making a false and fraudulent claim for disaster assistance benefits. JOHNSON stipulated that as a result of the fraudulent claim, he received benefits totaling $8,016.18. The case was investigated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Inspector General, the U.S. Secret Service, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General. As a result of his guilty plea to Count One, JOHNSON faces a maximum sentence of five (5) years imprisonment, a $250,000 fine, or both. As part of the plea agreement, the U.S. Attorney's Office will dismiss Count Two of the indictment when JOHNSON 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 twenty-two.

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.

For further information, contact David R. Dugas, U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Louisiana, or Lyman Thornton, First Assistant U.S. Attorney, at (225) 389-0443. Anyone suspecting criminal activity involving disaster assistance programs can make an anonymous report by calling the toll-free Hurricane Relief Fraud Hotline, 1-866-720-5721, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, until further notice. Information can also be emailed to the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force at HKFTF@leo.gov or sent by surface mail, with as many details as possible, to Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-4909.

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