



Department of Justice

United States Attorney Debra Wong Yang
Central District of California

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2005
www.usdoj.gov/usao/cac/

CONTACT: THOM MROZEK
TEL: (213) 894-6947

TWO CHARGED WITH IMPERSONATING RED CROSS OFFICIALS TO 'COLLECT' DONATIONS FOR VICTIMS OF HURRICANE KATRINA

Los Angeles, CA - A Burbank man and a Glendale woman have been charged with posing as American Red Cross volunteers and soliciting money under the false pretense that donations would assist the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Tino Lee, 44, and Gina Liz Nicholas, 19, were named in a criminal complaint filed late Friday night in United States District Court in Los Angeles. Lee and Nicholas are each charged with impersonating someone associated with the American Red Cross for the purpose of soliciting money, a felony offense that carries a potential penalty of five years in federal prison.

Lee and Nicholas allegedly were soliciting donations on behalf of the American Red Cross outside an electronics store in Burbank. They were arrested Thursday evening by officers with the Burbank Police Department after officers determined they did not have any paperwork linking them to the American Red Cross.

On Friday, the case was turned over the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which confirmed that Lee and Nicholas were not acting on behalf of the American Red Cross.

The case against Lee and Nicholas is the first federal case brought in the nation alleging a Hurricane Katrina scam. The United States Department of Justice recently established the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, which is designed to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud and insurance fraud; see: http://www.usdoj.gov/opa/pr/2005/September/05_ag_462.htm.

"We have taken a zero-tolerance position against those who would use a national tragedy such as Hurricane Katrina to line their pockets with money intended for victims," said United States Attorney Debra Wong Yang. "Victims of the hurricane should know that we will do everything to ensure that aid graciously donated by fellow Americans will reach those in need. And those wanting to assist and lend a hand to those less fortunate should know that any scam targeting their generosity will be shut down and those responsible will be punished to the fullest extent of the law."

Officials with the American Red Cross of Greater Los Angeles say the organization rarely has individual volunteers soliciting donations outside stores or in other public locations. When they do such solicitations it is normally in partnership with other organizations, like the Fire Department, and the media. Additionally, Red Cross volunteers will always offer a receipt for

cash donations, although the agency prefers that donors write checks made out to the "American Red Cross."

Lee and Nicholas are expected to make their initial court appearance in federal court in downtown Los Angeles Monday afternoon. They will remain in the custody of local authorities until Monday morning.

This case is the result of an investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Burbank Police Department.

#

Release No. 05-132