



The maximum penalty for making false claims to the government is five years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine. Mail fraud and wire fraud each carry maximum penalties of twenty years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine.

“People who take advantage of a natural disaster for personal financial gain not only cheat the government, but also cheat those who truly need assistance. Investigations are continuing, and we on the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force will continue the zero tolerance policy for fraud connected with hurricane relief efforts,” United States Attorney Deborah J. Rhodes said.

These individuals bring to 4 the total number of defendants who have been charged in the Southern District of Alabama with violations related to Hurricane Katrina relief funds. These cases are being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Sean Costello.

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 members from the FBI, the Federal Trade Commission, the Postal Inspector’s Office, and the Executive Office for United States Attorneys, among others.

Anyone with information about fraudulent activity is encouraged to report it immediately through the Department of Homeland Security Office of the Inspector General's Hurricane Relief Fraud Hotline at 1-866-720-5721.

An indictment is a determination by a grand jury that there is probable cause to believe that offenses have been committed by the defendant. The defendant, of course, is presumed innocent until and unless he or she is proven guilty at trial.

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