



Department of Justice

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LOUISIANA MAN CONVICTED OF FEDERAL HATE CRIME FOR BURNING HIS NEIGHBORS' HOME

WASHINGTON – A Louisiana man pleaded guilty today to firing three shots from a shotgun at the home of three Hispanic men and, after they fled, entering the home and setting a fire that burned it to the ground, the Justice Department announced. Johnny D. Mathis, 46, of Lecompte, La., entered his plea minutes before a jury trial was set to begin before U.S. District Judge Dee Drell in Alexandria, La.

Mathis pleaded guilty to all three counts in the pending indictment: criminal interference with the right to fair housing; use of fire to commit a felony; and use of a firearm during a crime of violence. Each count carries a maximum penalty of ten years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both. Furthermore, the ten year penalties for use of fire to commit a felony and use of a firearm during a crime of violence are mandatory, meaning that Mathis now faces a maximum sentence of 30 years and a mandatory minimum of 20 years in prison. Sentencing is scheduled for Jan. 13, 2010.

Testimony at today's guilty plea hearing established that on June 15, 2008, Mathis fired three shots from a shotgun at the home of three Hispanic men who shared the residence in a rural area of western Louisiana. Mathis' home was across the street from the victims' house. After hearing two shots, the victims fled their house. Once outside, the victims watched as Mathis fired a third shot into the trees and then entered the house, left briefly, and then returned. Minutes later, the house was engulfed in flames as Mathis exited the house. Subsequent investigation determined that the fire started in the kitchen where the victims had seen Mathis. Mathis admitted that his crime was motivated by the victims' race and national origin and was intended to interfere with their right to live in their home.

“Motivated by hate, the defendant fired a shotgun at a home that he later entered and burned down. No one should have to endure such an abhorrent act of criminal violence,” said Assistant Attorney General Thomas E. Perez of the Civil Rights Division. “The Justice Department will vigorously prosecute cases of bias motivated violence to the full extent of the law.”

U.S. Attorney Donald Washington stated: “These victims were targeted and subjected to acts of violence for no other reason than their race and national origin. We will continue to vigorously enforce federal laws that guarantee the civil rights of all people.”

This matter was investigated jointly by the FBI and the Rapides Parish, La., Sheriff’s Office. The case was prosecuted by Michael J. Frank, a Trial Attorney with the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division, and Assistant U.S. Attorney Mary J. Mudrick of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Western District of Louisiana.

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