



# Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

06/28/10

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## **FEMA FRAUDSTER PLEADS GUILTY** **AFTER CLAIMING HE WAS “VICTIM” IN FIVE STATES**

### *Filed Over 30 Fraudulent Claims For Disaster Relief for Hurricanes, Tornado, Flood*

ATLANTA, GA - DESIMA JAMES, 30, of Atlanta, Georgia, pleaded guilty today in federal district court to mail fraud for fraudulently obtaining FEMA assistance funds intended for the victims of several different federally declared disasters.

United States Attorney Sally Quillian Yates said of the case, “In just a few months, this defendant claimed to be a victim of five different natural disasters in five different states. He filed over 30 fraudulent claims with FEMA, using different names, fake social security numbers, and various addresses to escape detection and steal over \$30,000 in disaster relief that was intended for real victims. He now faces federal prison for his dishonesty and deceit.”

“When natural disaster strikes a city, people depend on the U.S. Mail to bring them both comfort and relief,” said Martin Phanco, Atlanta Division's Postal Inspector in Charge. “But Mr. James exploited other people's misfortune in hopes of being delivered a life of ease. Instead, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service and other members of the Katrina Fraud Task Force have worked together to deliver justice to this FEMA fraudster.”

According to United States Attorney Yates, the charges and other information presented in court: From September through December 2005, JAMES filed over 30 fraudulent claims for disaster relief with FEMA, claiming to have been a victim of Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana, Hurricane Rita in Louisiana and Texas, Hurricane Wilma in Florida, severe storms and flooding in New Hampshire, and a tornado and severe storms in Indiana. In making these claims, JAMES represented that he was living at various addresses in Louisiana, Texas, Florida, New Hampshire, and Indiana, when in fact he did not live at the claimed addresses during the time of the declared disasters. In addition to filing claims under his real name and social security number, JAMES also filed claims under the names “James Desima,” “Terrell James,” and “James Terrell,” and used different social security numbers not belonging to him. Based on his misrepresentations, JAMES received over \$30,000 in disaster assistance funds from

FEMA.

JAMES was indicted by a federal grand jury on January 26, 2010 for mail and wire fraud, false statements, and theft of government funds. He pleaded guilty today to one count of mail fraud and could receive a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000. In determining the actual sentence, the Court will consider the United States Sentencing Guidelines, which are not binding but provide appropriate sentencing ranges for most offenders.

Sentencing is scheduled for September 1, 2010, at 10 a.m., before United States District Judge Charles A. Pannell, Jr.

In September 2005, the Attorney General 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 Lanny A. Breuer of the Criminal Division – includes members from the FBI, the Federal Trade Commission, the Postal Inspector's Office and the Executive Office of United States Attorneys, among others.

This case is being investigated by Special Agents of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, and Postal Inspectors with the United States Postal Inspection Service.

Assistant United States Attorney Stephen H. McClain is prosecuting the case.

For further information please contact Sally Q. Yates, United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is [www.justice.gov/usao/gan](http://www.justice.gov/usao/gan).