



Department of Justice

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Western District of Louisiana

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2005
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TWO ARRESTED IN SHREVEPORT ON FEDERAL FEMA FRAUD CHARGES

Shreveport, Louisiana . . . Two Florida residents passing themselves off as Hurricane Katrina evacuees in order to fraudulently obtain FEMA relief funds were arrested today in Shreveport on charges of conspiracy, theft of federal funds, and mail and wire fraud, United States Attorney Donald W. Washington announced. KENNETH M. HODGE, age 33, and VERONICA JAEGER, age 22, both from Florida, were arrested and booked into the Caddo Correctional Center. The arrests resulted from a joint investigation by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, the U.S. Postal Inspector, and the Caddo Parish Sheriff's Office.

"Both defendants were detained after an initial appearance in U.S. District Court pending a detention hearing next Tuesday, and the matter will now be quickly turned over to the grand jury." U.S. Attorney Washington said. "The clear message is that those who attempt to fraudulently obtain FEMA relief money will be quickly apprehended and prosecuted."

Relief officials received a registration request on the FEMA Disaster Assistance registration website from HODGE claiming that his residence and personal belongings in Slidell, Louisiana had been destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. Based on the registration, FEMA mailed HODGE a check in care of a local shelter in the amount of \$2,000 for emergency food, shelter, clothing and medical assistance. A similar registration request was received by FEMA from JAEGER, also listing an address in Slidell, Louisiana. JAEGER also received a \$2,000 check from FEMA at the shelter. HODGE and JAEGER had registered at the shelter using a completely different address in Slidell. None of the Slidell addresses actually exist.

Follow-up investigation by federal and parish authorities revealed that HODGE and JAEGER are from Florida, not the New Orleans area, did not lose their home and belongings in Hurricane Katrina, and used a portion of the FEMA relief money to buy cocaine.

If convicted, both defendants face a maximum of five years in prison on the charge of conspiracy, ten years on the charge of theft, and twenty years on the charges of mail and wire fraud.

An indictment is merely an accusation and a defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty. Defendants are entitled to a presumption of innocence under the law, and the government has the burden of proving every element of the charges beyond a reasonable doubt.

Sentencing in federal court is determined by the discretion of federal judges and the governing statute. United States Sentencing Guidelines established by the United States Congress

and the United States Sentencing Commission are only used as guidelines by the judge in determining the appropriate sentence. Parole has been abolished in the federal system.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney C. Mignonne Griffing.

For further information, please contact United States Attorney Donald W. Washington at 337-262-6618 or First Assistant U.S. Attorney Bill Flanagan at 318-676-3600.

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