

NEWS RELEASE



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TWO PLEAD GUILTY TO FEMA FRAUD IN UNRELATED CASES

**Federal government committed to prosecuting those who attempt
to fraudulently obtain FEMA benefits**

LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA . . . United States Attorney Donald W. Washington announced today the guilty pleas of two defendants on FEMA fraud charges.

DAMIEN LAMONT CHEVIS, age 25, from Opelousas, Louisiana pleaded guilty to theft of public money, property, or records. In pleading guilty in federal court today, CHEVIS admitted to applying for emergency benefits following Hurricane Katrina, stating that he evacuated from Gulfport, Mississippi to Opelousas, Louisiana. As a result, CHEVIS was sent a \$2,000 check from the Federal Emergency Management Agency in November 2005. However, because CHEVIS was living in Opelousas prior to the hurricane, he was not entitled to any such benefits. CHEVIS admitted that he knew he was not entitled to the benefits but cashed the check and purchased clothing with the proceeds.

In an unrelated matter, **DWANA MARTIN**, age 40, from Fort Smith, Arkansas, pleaded guilty to

mail fraud today in federal court. MARTIN applied for \$2,000 in disaster relief funds in September 2005, claiming she had evacuated from New Orleans, Louisiana as a result of Hurricane Katrina. MARTIN had the check mailed to her aunt's home located in the Western District of Louisiana. When the defendant's aunt received the check and discovered it was a FEMA disaster relief check, she contacted law enforcement. In pleading guilty today, MARTIN admitted that she did not evacuate from New Orleans and was never entitled to the FEMA relief funds.

Sentencing will be scheduled for a later date to be determined by the court.

CHEVIS could be sentenced to a maximum of ten years federal imprisonment, a fine of not more than \$250,000, and a term of supervised release of up to three years following confinement.

MARTIN could be sentenced to no more than 20 years federal imprisonment, a fine of not more than \$250,000, and a term of supervised release of not more than five years following confinement.

Both cases were investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney John Luke Walker.

To date, the United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of Louisiana has charged 27 defendants with violations related to FEMA relief funds, and more than 130 FEMA fraud investigations are on-going in the Western District of Louisiana.

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.

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