



# Department of Justice

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**THREE FORMER SAN ANGELO, TEXAS, RESIDENTS FACE FEDERAL CHARGES  
FOR DEFRAUDING U.S. GOVERNMENT OF APPROXIMATELY \$30,000  
FOLLOWING HURRICANES KATRINA AND RITA**

**LUBBOCK, Tx.** — A federal grand jury returned a 21-count indictment today charging former San Angelo, Texas, residents, Sandra K. Howell, Charles J. Chaisson and Gregory J. Chaisson, with offenses related to a scheme they ran to defraud the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA) of approximately \$23,000 and the Department of Labor (DOL) of approximately \$7000 in disaster-related benefits following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, announced U.S. Attorney Richard B. Roper of the Northern District of Texas. Howell was arrested on June 26, 2007 in the Tucson, Arizona, area on charges in a federal criminal complaint filed in Lubbock the prior week, and is currently on bond. An arrest warrant has been issued for Gregory J. Chaisson and Charles J. Chaisson is in local/state custody in Lafayette Parish, Louisiana.

The indictment charges Sandra K. Howell, 53, and Charles J. Chaisson, 44, each with one count of conspiracy. Howell is also charged with two counts of making false claims, 10 counts of mail fraud, four counts of wire fraud, and three counts of theft of government funds. Gregory J. Chaisson, 46, was Howell's fiancé, and he is charged with three counts of theft of government funds. His brother, Charles J. Chaisson, is also charged with two counts of false claims, two counts of mail fraud, four counts of wire fraud and three counts of theft of government funds.

On Friday, September 23, 2005, the day Hurricane Rita made landfall on the Gulf Coast, Howell arrived in San Angelo, Texas, from Lafayette, Louisiana. She was accompanied by Charles J. Chaisson. At that time, Gregory J. Chaisson was in jail in Lafayette Parish, Louisiana. Upon his release from jail on January 17, 2006, Gregory J. Chaisson traveled to San Angelo and resided with Howell.

The indictment alleges that beginning on, or prior to August 29, 2005 and continuing to the present date, Howell and Charles J. Chaisson conspired together to defraud FEMA of approximately \$23,000 by falsely making claims to FEMA that they were victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Howell claimed that her primary residence in New Orleans was damaged by Hurricane Katrina and both Howell and Chaisson made false claims that their residence in Lafayette, Louisiana, was damaged by Hurricane Rita. In addition, they both made false claims for disaster relief on behalf of Gregory Chaisson, falsely stating that his primary residence was also damaged by Hurricane Rita.

However, Howell was not residing in New Orleans at all when Hurricane Katrina struck on August 29, 2005. During 2005 Howell resided in an apartment in Lafayette, Louisiana, until she moved at the end of August 2005. Further, neither Howell nor Charles J. Chaisson nor Gregory J. Chaisson was residing at the address in Lafayette, Louisiana, which each claimed sustained damages from Hurricane Rita.

The indictment also alleges that Howell and the Chaisson brothers made false claims to Concho Valley Workforce Solutions, a San Angelo-based organization that received and disbursed emergency relief funds for hurricane evacuees through a grant from DOL. As a result of Howell and the Chaisson brothers falsely portraying themselves as Hurricane Katrina evacuees, Concho Valley Workforce Solutions disbursed approximately \$7000 for their benefit.

One of the mail fraud counts against Sandra Howell relates to a false insurance claim made by Howell in September 2006 to defraud State Farm Insurance Company of approximately \$5500. Howell falsely claimed that she had been the victim of a theft, and personal property, including a three-carat diamond tennis bracelet and a half carat diamond ring, was stolen by Gregory J. Chaisson when he moved out of her residence in San Angelo. Howell well knew that the jewelry had not been stolen and she had it in her possession until she pawned it in January 2007, in Tucson, Arizona.

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 U.S. Attorneys, among others.

An indictment is an accusation by a federal grand jury and a defendant is entitled to the presumption of innocence unless proven guilty. Each conspiracy and false claims count carries a maximum statutory sentence of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Each count of theft of government funds carries a maximum statutory sentence of ten years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Each mail fraud and wire fraud count carries a maximum statutory sentence of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Restitution could be ordered.

U.S. Attorney Roper praised the investigative efforts in this case of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Homeland Security - Office of the Inspector General, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Department of Labor - Office of the Inspector General and the San Angelo Police Department. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Ann C. Roberts of the Lubbock Office of the U.S. Attorney's Office.

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