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JURY CONVICTS FOR RECEIPT OF STOLEN FEMA TRAILER

Co-defendant Pleads Guilty to Theft of Stolen FEMA Trailers

Alexandria, Louisiana . . . JAMES L. SIMPSON, JR., 49, of Jonesville, La., was convicted by a federal jury today of receiving a stolen FEMA trailer, United States Attorney Donald W. Washington announced. After a one-day trial and only 15 minutes of deliberation, a jury returned a guilty verdict on one count of receiving stolen property of the United States. U. S. District Judge Dee D. Drell ordered SIMPSON to be taken into federal custody immediately. Sentencing is set for September 18, 2009. SIMPSON faces a maximum of 10 years in a federal prison and a \$250,000 fine.

SIMPSON was indicted by a federal grand jury on February 25, 2009, along with co-defendant Robert D. Dibenedetto. Dibenedetto pleaded guilty on May 22, 2009, to stealing two FEMA trailers valued at \$10,000 each. Sentencing for Dibenedetto is set for September 18, 2009.

The FBI investigation began by anonymous tip that two stolen FEMA trailers were located in East Central Louisiana. Testimony at trial revealed that on January 19, 2006, a FEMA trailer was discovered on SIMPSON's property on Black River Lake in Catahoula Parish. Agents located the identifying numbers on

the trailer and contacted FEMA, which in turn verified that the trailer was FEMA property. There was also no record of SIMPSON receiving any FEMA benefits.

United States Attorney Donald W. Washington stated: “Disaster assistance should go to the real hurricane victims and not to people who illegally enrich themselves by stealing from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Law enforcement will continue to investigate and prosecute abuse of the disaster assistance program.”

Sentencing in federal court is determined by the discretion of federal judges and the governing statute. Parole has been abolished in the federal system.

This case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Alexandria, the Louisiana State Police and the Catahoula Parish Sheriff’s Office, and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney J. Scott Williams.

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