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**NEW IBERIA RESIDENT PLEADS  
GUILTY TO STEALING FROM FEMA**

*False claims submitted for Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Gustav and Ike damage*

**LAFAYETTE, La:** United States Attorney Stephanie A. Finley announced today that Jacqueline Marie Benjamin, 43, of New Iberia, La., pleaded guilty before U.S. District Court Judge Richard T. Haik to conspiring to defraud the Federal Emergency Management Agency out of thousands of dollars in false hurricane damage claims.

In a 2005 application to FEMA following hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the defendant's sister-in-law Valerie Benjamin applied for rental assistance money claiming she was forced to move as a result of storm damage to her home. According to the stipulated factual basis signed by the defendant in open court, Valerie Benjamin listed her new residence in New Iberia as a rental property and listed Jacqueline Benjamin as her landlord when she was not. As a result of the fraudulent claim, between April 20, 2007 and June 22, 2007, Jacqueline Benjamin received four checks for storm damage losses. The defendant took \$200 out of each check and paid Valerie Benjamin.

Jacqueline Benjamin also admitted in the stipulated factual basis that in 2008 following hurricanes Gustav and Ike, she gave permission for Valerie Benjamin to file FEMA disaster assistance applications in her name. The FEMA application stated that Jacqueline Benjamin had to evacuate her home because of storm damage. The application also contained false landlord statements, false medical bills, false medical bill receipts, false insurance statements, false rental agreements, and false rental receipts. Jacqueline Benjamin admitted that she never left her home, and the home sustained only minor damage. Between Dec. 22, 2008 and April 9, 2009, the defendant received four checks for storm damage losses. She took \$200 out of each check and paid Valerie Benjamin.

Jacqueline Benjamin faces five years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, or both with three years of supervised release. A sentencing date has not been set.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency conducted the investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Joseph T. Mickel is prosecuting the case.

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