



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JOPLIN MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO DISASTER FRAUD RELATED TO TORNADO BENEFITS

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Tammy Dickinson, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that a Joplin, Mo., man pleaded guilty in federal court today to fraudulently receiving federal disaster benefits following the May 22, 2011 tornado.

Andy Eric Brownlee, 31, of Joplin, pleaded guilty before U.S. Magistrate Judge David P. Rush to the charge contained in a Dec. 13, 2012, federal indictment.

By pleading guilty today, Brownlee admitted that he knowingly made materially fraudulent statements and representations to FEMA in connection with his application for disaster assistance.

Brownlee completed a FEMA application for disaster assistance on May 26, 2011, claiming that his Joplin residence had been damaged by the tornado. Brownlee received a payment of \$2,750. However, Brownlee admitted today that the address he used in his FEMA application was actually the address of the Lazarus Ministries Halfway house, which was not his residence at the time of the tornado. Brownlee previously resided there, but moved out prior to the tornado.

Under federal statutes, Brownlee is subject to a sentence of up to 30 years in federal prison without parole, plus a fine up to \$250,000 and an order of restitution. A sentencing hearing will be scheduled after the completion of a presentence investigation by the United States Probation Office.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Steven M. Mohlhenrich. It was investigated by Homeland Security Investigation – Office of Inspector General, the FBI and the Joplin, Mo., Police Department.

Disaster Fraud Hotline

Anyone with information about disaster fraud related to the Joplin tornado should call the National Center for Disaster Fraud hotline at 866-720-5721, the Joplin Police Department at 417-623-3131, or the FBI's Joplin office at 417-206-5700.

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