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District of New Jersey*

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**OCEAN COUNTY, N.J. WOMAN ADMITS DEFRAUDING FEMA  
AFTER MAJOR DISASTERS**

TRENTON, N.J. – A Brick, New Jersey, woman today admitted stealing benefit money from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) after major storms in New Jersey, falsely claiming she needed the funds for housing, U.S. Attorney Paul J. Fishman announced.

Sara L. Cengiz, 47, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Freda L. Wolfson in Trenton federal court to an information charging her with disaster benefits fraud related to Hurricane Irene.

According to documents filed in this case and statements made in court:

On April 2, 2010, a Presidential Disaster Declaration was issued for certain areas in the State of New Jersey adversely affected by severe storms, which occurred in March 2010. Cengiz filed an application the following month with FEMA seeking federal rental assistance and assistance for personal property damage. Cengiz admitted that in her application, she falsely claimed she had to rent another residence because her residence was damaged as a result of the severe storms and was unfit for occupancy. Cengiz submitted fraudulent lease agreements and rental receipts to FEMA to prove she was paying rent, which she was not. From May 2010 to June 2011, Cengiz received \$26,938 in fraudulently obtained FEMA disaster-related funds.

On Aug. 31, 2011, a Presidential Disaster Declaration for the State of New Jersey was issued as a result of Hurricane Irene. The next month, Cengiz again filed an application with FEMA seeking federal rental assistance and assistance for personal property damage as a result of Hurricane Irene. Cengiz admitted that she again falsely claimed her residence was unfit for occupancy. Cengiz again submitted fraudulent lease agreements and rental receipts to FEMA to prove she was paying rent. From November 2011 to January 2012, Cengiz received \$13,039 in fraudulently obtained FEMA disaster related funds.

The charge to which Cengiz pleaded guilty carries a maximum potential penalty of 30 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. As part of her plea agreement, Cengiz will also be required to pay restitution. Sentencing is scheduled for March 27, 2015.

U.S. Attorney Fishman credited special agents of the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, Philadelphia Field Office, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Gregory Null, with the investigation leading to today's guilty plea.