



PRESS-REGISTER

Fund to fight disaster fraud

Saturday, June 17, 2006

By GARY McELROY Staff Reporter

The bull's-eye on scam artists and cheats who prey on hurricane victims zoomed more into focus Friday as the mayor of Mobile, the city's police chief and the county district attorney announced the arrival of new weapons to combat disaster-related fraud -- money, education and prevention.

The money arrived via federal and local subsidies totaling \$842,222 and is, in part, slated to fund a disaster response team and strike force, initiated by the district attorney's office.

District Attorney John Tyson Jr. pointed out that this announcement, made in the atrium of Mobile Government Plaza, came on the same day that Mobile County's June grand jury delivered its report upstairs on the eighth floor of the courthouse in the north tower.

And among those indicted this month were two men who last year allegedly took advantage of hurricane victims.

One of those named by Tyson was Theodore resident John David Mosley, 34, of South Alabama Roofing. The grand jury indicted him on charges of theft of property after he allegedly bilked a Mobile woman out of nearly \$2,000 for roof repairs that were never done.

Scam artists will, for instance, ask that half the money for a contracted job be paid in advance, Tyson said. Once they get it, that's the last the homeowners see of them.

Without referring to Mosley, who has not been convicted of the charges against him, Mayor Sam Jones said Friday that new local efforts at stemming disaster-related fraud would, in particular, hone in on what he called these "bogus contractors."

Part of the task force's job will be to educate Mobilians on how to spot and deal with scammers and what to do if victimized, Tyson said.

In another case, the district attorney said, 43-year-old William Todd Ivey was charged with stealing a debit card from a hurricane evacuee in a shelter at Cypress Shores Baptist Church.

Tyson said that according to the investigative work of Mobile police Detective Greg Morris, Ivey went on a spending spree with the card, buying \$2,550 worth of goods and services in Mobile and Baldwin counties in the month after the storm.

These and similar cases, interim Police Chief Lester Hargrove said Friday, "are very important to us."

Tyson said area banks, credit unions and other businesses are already onboard in a collective community effort to prevent, curb and catch scammers from using disasters to their advantage.

Beyond those efforts, the district attorney said, part of the funding will also be used to focus attention on the accelerated rates of domestic violence in the wake of hurricanes and recovery efforts.

Tyson urged anyone interested in gathering information about the task force, how to recognize scams and how to bring scammers to justice to call 574-6685.

The public is also invited to the 2006 hurricane season's first meeting of the disaster and fraud response team, to take place at 9 a.m. June 27 in the district attorney's fifth floor meeting room in Mobile Government Plaza.

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