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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JOPLIN WOMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO DISASTER FRAUD RELATED TO TORNADO BENEFITS

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – David M. Ketchmark, Acting United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced today that a Joplin, Mo., woman has pleaded guilty in federal court to fraudulently receiving federal disaster benefits following the May 22, 2011 tornado.

Amber Nicole Peters, 22, of Joplin, pleaded guilty before U.S. Magistrate Judge James C. England on Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2012, to disaster fraud.

Peters admitted that she applied for federal disaster benefits by falsely claiming that her home and property had been damaged or destroyed in the May 22, 2011 tornado. In reality, Peters met a FEMA inspector at the tornado-damaged home belonging to her recently-deceased grandmother, which she falsely claimed was her primary residence. FEMA authorized payment in the amount of \$3,596, of which \$2,658 was for loss of personal property and \$938 was for rental assistance. Peters was paid by electronic funds transfer on June 7, 2011.

As a result of Peters's false claim, FEMA initially denied the legitimate claim later filed by her aunt, who lived at the home with Peters's grandmother.

Under federal statutes, Peters 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 the FBI, Homeland Security Investigations-Office of Inspector General, 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.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

<http://www.justice.gov/usao/mow/index.html>

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