



# Department of Justice

United States Attorney  
Southern District of Florida

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99 N.E. 4 STREET  
MIAMI, FL 33132  
TEL: (305) 961-9000

## AVENTURA MAN CHARGED WITH HURRICANE KATRINA INTERNET SCAM

R. Alexander Acosta, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, and Michael S. Clemens, Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), announced today the Indictment and arrest of defendant, Gary S. Kraser, for fraudulently soliciting charitable donations supposedly intended for humanitarian relief to the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Kraser was charged with four counts of wire fraud, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1343.

According to Indictment, Kraser falsely claimed in conversations on the Internet, and ultimately via the website at [www.AirKatrina.com](http://www.AirKatrina.com), that he was piloting flights to Louisiana to provide medical supplies to the areas affected by Hurricane Katrina and to evacuate children and others in critical medical condition. Kraser further claimed that he had organized a group of Florida pilots to assist him in his supposed relief efforts.

In one fraudulent Internet communication posted on August 30, 2005, Kraser pretended to have returned from Louisiana, and wrote, "I am shaking as I write this, as I just arrived home, and just now allowed my body and mind to accept what I saw tonight . . . I am crying as I read this . . . I saw people on their roofs, that had used axes more than likely to cut through the roof, waving at us, as they thought we were Air Rescue . . . I saw dogs wrapped in electrical lines still alive and sparks flying from their bodies being electrocuted, as well as some people dead already. If I had a helicopter, I would be there now rather than back in FL . . . I'm so sorry I couldn't do more . . . I'm crying and hugging my dog next to me now . . . I will hear these screams for the rest of my life. . ."

In another fraudulent communication posted on August 31, 2005, Kraser wrote, "I'm flying full loads out, and offering the empty plane on the outbound for Air Ambulance. If we didn't have the plane, I don't think the little baby would have survived . . . She is undergoing transplant surgery at this moment I am writing . . . 7 mos old, and smiling the whole way, as if she knew . . ." In yet another fraudulent posting, Kraser claimed that he "tipped wings" with AirForce One while over Louisiana.

According to the Indictment, Kraser claimed that he personally paid for these fictitious relief flights, and that he approved the creation of the website [www.AirKatrina.com](http://www.AirKatrina.com) to solicit donations supposedly to purchase the fuel for his claimed humanitarian aid missions. According to the website, "every dollar, every nickel, [would] go directly into the tanks of these pilots planes on their mission of mercy."

The website allowed for donations to be made directly into Kraser's PayPal account, a service that allows customers to send and receive money online for transactions conducted over the Internet. In addition, Kraser provided instructions for wiring contributions directly into his bank account. PayPal was among the first to cooperate with the investigation, and deserves our thanks. In just two days, Kraser received almost \$40,000 in donations from forty-eight (48) different victims from around the world.

Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales recently created the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, designed to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud, identity theft and insurance fraud. The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force -- chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division -- includes members from the FBI, the Federal Trade Commission, the Postal Inspector's Office, and the Executive Office of the United States Attorneys, among others. This is the first Hurricane Katrina Internet charity fraud case brought by the Department of Justice and is part of the Attorney General's nationwide efforts to prosecute those who seek to benefit from the Hurricane Katrina tragedy.

United States Attorney Acosta stated, "The dreams, homes, and lives of thousands of families have been destroyed. Our goal with this prosecution, and with the creation of the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, is to help restore the hope and faith of the victims of Katrina in their fellow Americans' willingness to help. It is simply unconscionable and intolerable that anyone would seek a personal financial benefit from the horrible human tragedy caused by Hurricane Katrina."

FBI Special Agent in Charge Michael Clemens stated, "Catastrophes, for the most part, bring out the best in people. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina we have seen extraordinary acts of heroism and kindness. Unfortunately, catastrophes also bring out the worst in some people. The public should be assured that the FBI will not tolerate individuals who fraudulently take advantage of these types of disasters and will investigate thoroughly any alleged criminal activity."

Mr. Acosta commended the investigative efforts of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. In addition, Mr. Acosta encouraged anyone with information about Hurricane Katrina fraud to contact law enforcement. Several existing government websites and resources are available to obtain information about, and report instances of, Katrina-related fraud. The FBI website, [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov), contains updated alerts about particular types of charity-related frauds. Members of the public can also report instances of fraud on the Website for the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center, at [www.ic3.gov](http://www.ic3.gov). The Federal Trade Commission provides additional information at its website, [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov), and a toll-free FTC hotline, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357, TTY/TDD: 202-326-2502), also allows consumers to report suspected fraud schemes, including Katrina-related fraud.

A copy of all press releases may be found on the website of the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida at [www.usdoj.gov/usao/fls](http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/fls). Related court documents and information may be found on the website of the District Court for the Southern District of Florida at [www.flsd.uscourts.gov](http://www.flsd.uscourts.gov) or on <http://pacer.flsd.uscourts.gov/>.