

First Comes the Disaster Then Comes the Fraud

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SAN FRANCISCO, CA, UDS, October 10, 2013 /EINPresswire.com/ -- ([Justice News Flash: Featured Column](#)) It's only September but already 2013 is shaping up as a bad year for natural disasters in the United States. There have been devastating tornadoes in Oklahoma, wildfires all around the West, and more recently, massive flooding in Colorado. And hurricane season is only half over at this point. When hurricanes, tornados, floods, and massive wildfires strike, the federal government provides mightily in disaster relief. A report released in April says that Uncle Sam shelled out [\\$136 billion](#) in disaster aid between 2011 and 2013. That's about \$400 per household.

The report finds that costly catastrophes have risen dramatically over the past two decades. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the number of "weather events" that exact over [\\$1 billion](#) in damage has risen from two per year in the 1980s to more than ten per year since 2010. Most Americans don't quibble with disaster relief in theory. After Hurricane Katrina every American came to know what FEMA was supposed to do. It wasn't a question of whether the government should be helping the hurricane victims. It was why the government wasn't helping them fast enough.

As citizens and taxpayers, we expect the government to move in (we hope swiftly) after a disaster with food, clothing, and shelter to help with emergency needs. These programs address natural disasters and man-made ones, too, such as the giant BP oil spill on the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. Once the exigency has passed, the programs continue to provide important relief helping disaster victims to rebuild their lives, their homes and their businesses.

Unfortunately, when one of these disasters happens and the federal aid spigot gets turned on, shysters descend like ants at a picnic. The fraud was so wide-spread in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, in 2005, that the government established the National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF). Its purpose is to research, prosecute, and repel fraud associated with disaster relief programs. And it is not just FEMA that is at risk of being bilked. Medicare and Medicaid, too, are vulnerable. For example, these agencies often will fast-track reimbursements to beneficiaries when wheelchairs, motorized scooters, and other durable medical equipment have been lost or damaged in a flood or other disaster. This expedited claims process has become just one of the

new avenues for fraudsters to submit bogus claims to the government in the wake of a disaster.

While it is not possible to predict what the next disaster will be, or where it will hit, one thing is certain. Some new fraud will emerge to skim whatever the government is giving out in relief. As with any fraud on the government, however, the more money drained from these programs the less money is available when the next disaster everyone knows is going to happen actually strikes. That's why doctors, nurses, home health aides, pharmacy techs, or anyone else with evidence of health care fraud in the wake of a disaster, should consider becoming a whistleblower and filing a False Claims Act lawsuit on behalf of the federal government. When they report a case of disaster fraud, they aren't just helping the victims of the calamity that's already struck. They're safeguarding precious resources for the victims of the disaster that no one has even contemplated yet.

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