

Louisiana reports ID fraud following Katrina

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BATON ROUGE, Louisiana, (Reuters) - Identity thieves are preying on Louisiana residents forced from their homes by Hurricane Katrina, the state attorney general's office said on Tuesday.

Consumer protection officials said complaints were coming in from hurricane victims who discovered the thefts when they applied for financial aid from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"When they (hurricane victims) go into apply, they'll find that somebody has already done it in their name," said Isabel Wingerter, director of the Louisiana Attorney General's public protection division.

Thieves were able to apply for the aid using the victim's social security numbers.

Experts had warned that identity theft could become a problem in the wake of the storm with thieves taking birth certificates, banking and other sensitive documents left among the waterlogged debris.

Wingerter said Louisiana officials had received about 50 complaints of identity fraud in the past day, but she expected the number to grow as more storm victim apply for federal assistance.

Displaced hurricane victims were also being urged to file for changes of addresses with the U.S. Post Office to prevent sensitive materials from being delivered to their wrecked homes before they return.

The Justice Department in Washington has set up a task force to investigate identity theft and other types of fraud related to the Katrina.