



**November 13, 2019**

**Contact: Kimberlee Leach**  
**Director of Communications**  
**Dallas County District Attorney's Office**  
**214-653-3756 (Office)**  
[Kimberlee.leach@DallasCounty.org](mailto:Kimberlee.leach@DallasCounty.org)

**For Immediate Release: DAs Office Seeking Enhanced Penalties for Crimes  
Committed in Disaster Areas**

**(Dallas, Texas)** – The Dallas County Criminal District Attorney's Office will seek enhanced penalties for anyone caught looting in tornado-ravaged areas of Dallas County. Several people have already been arrested for stealing from homes and buildings hardest hit by as many as ten tornadoes that struck on the night of October 20, according to the National Weather Service.

The DAs Office is using a new law that went into effect on September 1 that seeks harsher punishment for crimes, like burglary, assaults, and robberies, committed in disaster areas. "Our Legislators in Austin got it right. They gave us some powerful tools to protect victims of disasters that we intend on using when appropriate," said Assistant District Attorney Robert Withers.

The enhancement goes into effect anytime the president, the governor, or county judge or mayor declares a state of disaster. The definition of disaster is "the occurrence or imminent threat of widespread or severe damage, injury, or loss of life or property resulting from any natural or man-made cause." Some examples listed in the statute are fire, flood, earthquake, and wind, etc.

A burglary of a building normally carries a range of punishment between 180 days and two years confinement. However, under the new enhancement rule, a burglary of a building committed in a disaster zone can be punished between two and ten years in prison. If the burglary is of a home located in a disaster area, an individual now faces anywhere between five years to life in prison. The sentence for the same crime before September 1 was two to twenty years.

"The District Attorney's Office is using this new enhancement law to help people who have already been victimized by a devastating tornado, or other disaster, from becoming victimized again by looters," said Jason Hermus, Chief of Division C and the Community Response Team.

The outbreak of tornadoes caused \$2 billion in losses and turned many lives upside-down. The District Attorney's Office is doing all that it can to protect these families and business owners from further devastation.

If you see something, say something. The two women were arrested because someone saw them looting under the cover of darkness and called authorities.