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AG ANNOUNCES CONVICTION IN TORNADO LOOTING CASE

(MONTGOMERY) – Attorney General Luther Strange announced a conviction today in a Tuscaloosa case related to the looting that occurred in the aftermath of the tornados that struck on April 27, 2011. Michael Evans Dawson pleaded guilty today to first-degree receiving stolen property and to first-degree possession of marijuana.

Dawson was sentenced by Tuscaloosa County Circuit Judge John H. England Jr. to concurrent terms of 36 months for receiving stolen property and 32 months for possession of marijuana, which were suspended for a term of three years of probation. If the defendant pays full and court costs, the probation may be reduced to two years. The restitution due is \$552 based on damage to items that were recovered.

Specifically, the charges to which Dawson pleaded guilty are that he intentionally received the following stolen property: a Suzuki 4-wheeler, Tao 4-wheeler, chainsaw, electric trimmer, CB radio, extension cord, drop light and camera tripod; and that he unlawfully possessed marijuana for purposes other than his own person use.

“This conviction holds the defendant to account under existing law at the time, and is important in sending a message that looting cases will be prosecuted,” said Attorney General Strange. “Because previous state law did not have a crime specific to looting, we applied existing laws to fight these cases to the best of our ability. But we also acted to get a tough new law that criminalizes looting and provides strong penalties to more effectively punish and deter looting in the future.”

In the wake of the tragic tornadoes of 2011, Attorney General Strange developed legislation based on discussions within the Attorney General’s Law Enforcement Advisory Committee and the law officers’ recommendations for better tools to combat looting. The Legislature gave its final approval on May 3. The new law makes looting a class C felony, which is punishable by one to 10 years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$15,000. It states that “a person commits the crime of looting if the person intentionally enters without authorization any building or real property during a state of emergency and obtains, exerts control over, damages or removes the property of another person without lawful authority.” It also is specified that a person subject to prosecution for looting still may be prosecuted for other applicable offenses.

Attorney General Strange commended Assistant Attorneys General John Hensley and James Rutter of his Criminal Trials Division and the Tuscaloosa Police Department for their work in handling this and other looting cases. The Attorney General’s Office is handling approximately 20 other pending cases related to looting after the 2011 tornadoes.

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