



Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Jury Convicts Florida Man of Arson-for-Profit Scheme

RICHMOND, Va. – A federal jury convicted a Florida man today of running a 15-year insurance fraud scheme that involved at least 27 fires in two states.

Verdon Taylor, 72, of Leesburg, was found guilty of conspiracy, wire fraud, use of fire to commit a federal felony, and witness tampering in connection with the fraud. Taylor and four co-conspirators, Vershawn Jackson, 39, and Marie Taylor, 54, both of Richmond, along with Sylvia Mitchell, aka Sylvia Jackson, 59, of Tampa, Florida, and Eugenia Fleming, 57, of Victoria, were indicted on March 8. According to court records and evidence presented at trial, Verdon Taylor and his co-conspirators participated in a long-running arson-for-profit scheme in which the conspirators purchased cars or mobile homes at auction, or signed leases at rental properties, insured the property, and set fire to the insured property to collect insurance proceeds. In many instances, the time between the purchase of insurance and the fire was mere weeks or even days. The evidence at trial also showed that the defendants made a practice of staging mobile homes and rental properties with furniture and clothing that had been purchased at flea markets or auctions, and on several occasions had been in other properties that previously burned. Over the course of the scheme, defrauded insurance companies paid out over \$1 million on claims by the conspirators.

Verdon Taylor faces a maximum penalty of 50 years in prison when sentenced on Jan. 2, 2018. The co-defendants have entered guilty pleas to conspiracy to commit wire fraud, and each faces a maximum of 20 years in prison. The maximum statutory sentence is prescribed by Congress and is provided here for informational purposes, as the sentencing of the defendants will be determined by the court based on the advisory Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Dana J. Boente, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, Arron J. Graves, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' (ATF) Washington Field Division, Henry Rosenbaum, Henrico County Fire Marshal, and Melvin D. Carter, Chief of the Richmond Fire Department, made the announcement after the verdict was accepted by U.S.

District Judge Robert E. Payne. Assistant U.S. Attorneys David V. Harbach, II, Michael C. Moore, and Janet Jin Ah Lee are prosecuting the case.

This case was investigated by the ATF with assistance from the Henrico County Fire Department and the Richmond Fire Department.

A copy of this press release is located on the website of the [U.S. Attorney's Office](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia. Related court documents and information is located on the website of the [District Court](#) for the Eastern District of Virginia or on [PACER](#) by searching for **Case No. 3:17-cr-29**.

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