

NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

DECEMBER 21, 2006

Randy G. Massey, Acting United States Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois, announced today that on December 21, 2006, **SUSAN JILL BLADES**, age 43, of West Frankfort, Illinois, pleaded guilty to a one-count Information in United States District Court in Benton, Illinois.

The Information charged that from on or about November 2003, to October 22, 2004, in Franklin County, Illinois, within the Southern District of Illinois, and elsewhere, **SUSAN JILL BLADES** did embezzle, steal, obtain by fraud and otherwise without authority knowingly convert to her use property valued at \$5,000 or more and owned by or under the care, custody, and control of the West Frankfort Water Department (WFWD).

The facts were as follows. Between 1985 and October 22, 2004, BLADES worked for the WFWD, which is a local government agency of the City of West Frankfort. During BLADES' employment at the WFWD, the manner in which the WFWD collected deposits for accounts was as follows. When a new customer came to the WFWD to request service, a deposit of \$30 or \$90 was required. The \$30 deposit was collected from new customers who owned the property for which they were activating water. The \$90 deposit was collected for new customers who were renting the property for which they were activating water. BLADES admitted that she stole cash related to the deposits. During the time period from on or about November 2003, to October 22, 2004, BLADES embezzled more than \$5,000 from the WFWD in this manner. The total loss in this case to the WFWD was \$10,000.

The possible penalties in this case are a term of imprisonment of up to 10 years, a fine of not more than \$250,000, and a term of supervised release of up to 3 years. BLADES' sentencing is set for March 26, 2007, at 9:00 a.m., in United States District Court in East St. Louis, Illinois.

The investigation in this case was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney George A. Norwood.