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JUSTICE NEWS

**Department of Justice**

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**Pennsylvania Man Pleads Guilty for Cross Burning**

WASHINGTON— Kenneth Stiffey Jr. of Robinson, Penn., pleaded guilty yesterday to a charge related to the burning of a cross in the yard of an African-American victim in November 2009, the Justice Department announced today.

Stiffey, 21, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to interfere with the housing rights of another in federal court in Pittsburgh before Senior U.S. District Judge Maurice B. Cohill. Information presented during the plea hearing established that a cross burning occurred on Nov. 14, 2009, at a residence in Robinson that was home to a family with three minor children, one of whom is African-American. The investigation revealed that Stiffey and his co-conspirators agreed to burn a cross in the backyard of the home of the African-American minor victim. After the cross was constructed and doused in accelerant, Stiffey transported the 6-foot wooden cross to a garage owned by Stiffey's family. Together with co-conspirators, Stiffey carried the cross into his garage and supplied additional gasoline, which was poured on the cross. One of the co-conspirators then took the cross, jumped the fence onto the backyard of the victim's property, stuck it into the ground and, using a cigarette lighter, ignited it around 11 p.m.

"This defendant used an unmistakable symbol of hate to threaten a family with violence simply because the race of a child. These incidents are a reminder of the civil rights challenges we still face today," said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "We will continue to aggressively prosecute hate crimes of this kind."

"This case underscores our commitment to prosecute those who commit crimes driven by hatred or intolerance," stated U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Pennsylvania David J. Hickton.

On Feb. 9, 2011, co-conspirator Michael Francis Bealonis pleaded guilty to conspiracy to interfere with the housing rights of another in federal court in Pittsburgh.

Sentencing has been set for July 26, 2011. The law provides for a maximum punishment of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

The case was investigated by the FBI, together with the Pennsylvania State Police. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Soo C. Song from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Pennsylvania and Trial Attorney Patricia A. Sumner from the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice.

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Civil Rights Division