



News Releases

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ICE arrests 21 illegal aliens in worksite probe targeting three Asian restaurants *Enforcement action is part of ongoing ICE investigation*

SACRAMENTO, Calif. - U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) special agents executed federal criminal search warrants here yesterday at two area Chinese restaurants and two homes linked to the businesses' owners as part of an ongoing ICE investigation into possible hiring and alien harboring violations.

The restaurants targeted during the operation were the King's Buffet in Vacaville, Calif., and the Empire Buffet in Vallejo, Calif. A second outlet of the Empire Buffet in San Pablo, Calif., is also under scrutiny in the probe, but it was not searched yesterday. In addition to executing four search warrants, agents conducted a consensual search at a fifth location, a home in Hercules, Calif. Besides gathering evidence related to the criminal case, ICE agents arrested 21 illegal alien workers on administrative immigration violations who were encountered at the search locations.

Of those arrested, 13 were found at the restaurants and eight others were discovered at homes owned by individuals affiliated with the restaurants. The three residences are located in Vacaville, Vallejo and Hercules. Agents who searched the homes say they encountered squalor and rodent droppings and it appeared all of the homes were being used to house significant numbers of people. Inside they discovered makeshift walls and mattresses in many of the rooms, including the garages.

According to the affidavit filed in support of the search warrants, the enforcement actions stem from an investigation that began after local law enforcement responded to a citizen's call about suspicious activity at a Vacaville residence at 843 Purple Sage Drive. After receiving the lead from local authorities, ICE opened its investigation.

During the ensuing probe, agents uncovered evidence that illegal alien employees of the King's Buffet were being housed at the home on Purple Sage Drive, while unauthorized workers from the Empire Buffet were living at a residence on Glacier Court in Vallejo. According to the affidavit, investigators also determined that some of the restaurants' illegal alien employees were being paid in cash and that wage information about those workers was not being reported to the California Employment Development Department as required by law.

"No business, regardless of size, type or location, is immune from complying with the law," said Daniel Lane, assistant special agent in charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in Sacramento. "All too often, illegal alien workers are exploited in some fashion by the businesses that hire them, and that is unacceptable. Our investigation in this case is ongoing and we will go where the evidence leads us."

The illegal alien workers identified during the operation are from six countries - China (9), Mexico (5), Guatemala (3), Indonesia (2), Singapore (1) and Honduras (1). The workers were transported to ICE's Sacramento office where they were photographed, fingerprinted and processed. They were also interviewed to elicit information about possible health, caregiver or other humanitarian issues, and to identify any urgent medical needs. The information aids ICE in making decisions about whether to detain an individual or permit a conditional humanitarian release.

As a result of the interviews, one of the illegal alien workers was released on humanitarian grounds pending a future hearing before an immigration judge. The remaining individuals were transferred to ICE contract detention facilities in northern California where they will also await a hearing before a federal immigration judge.

Since ICE was established in March 2003, it has dramatically enhanced its efforts to combat the unlawful employment of illegal aliens in this country. So far this fiscal year (Sept. 30, 2007 through Aug. 30, 2008), ICE has made 1,070 criminal arrests tied to worksite enforcement investigations. Of those, 123 are owners, managers, supervisors or human resources employees accused of violations ranging from alien harboring to knowingly hiring illegal aliens. The remaining criminal defendants are workers arrested on charges including aggravated identity theft and Social Security fraud. ICE has also made approximately 4,700 administrative arrests for immigration violations during worksite enforcement operations this fiscal year.

To help employers build a legal workforce, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has an initiative called the ICE Mutual Agreement between Government and Employers or IMAGE. IMAGE is designed to build cooperative relationships between the government and businesses, strengthen hiring practices, and reduce the unlawful employment of illegal aliens. The initiative also seeks to gain greater industry compliance and corporate due diligence through enhanced training and education of employers. ICE strongly encourages employers to review IMAGE program materials available at www.ICE.gov.

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U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key

homeland security priorities.

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