



[News Room \(http://www.ice.gov/news/\)](http://www.ice.gov/news/) » [Recent Releases \(http://www.ice.gov/news/releases/\)](http://www.ice.gov/news/releases/)

News Releases

MARCH 8, 2011 LOS ANGELES, CA

LA-area furniture company executive gets prison time for hiring illegal workers

LOS ANGELES - The president of a Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., furniture manufacturing business was sentenced Monday to 10 months in federal prison on two criminal counts after a probe by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) revealed the company hired unauthorized alien workers.

Rick M. Vartanian, 57, of Ladera Ranch, Calif., the president and primary shareholder of Brownwood Furniture, was sentenced to 10 months for obstruction of justice and six months for continuing to employ illegal aliens. The sentences will be served concurrently. In addition to the prison term, U.S. District Court Judge Gary Fees also ordered Vartanian to pay a \$15,000 fine.

Monday's sentencing follows Vartanian's guilty plea in Dec. 2010 to charges arising from an investigation by ICE HSI into the company's hiring practices. According to court documents, in November 2009, Vartanian told HSI agents that unauthorized workers identified during the agency's earlier audit were no longer employed by the company. In reality, 18 of those individuals continued to work for the business and the company took steps to shield them from detection by HSI.

In addition to Vartanian, Brownwood Furniture's vice president was also charged in the case. In Dec. 2010, Michael Patrick Eberly, 48, of Alta Loma, Calif., pleaded guilty to one count of continuing to employ unauthorized workers. Eberly was subsequently sentenced to one year's probation and ordered to pay a \$10,000 fine.

"As these sentences make clear, employers who knowingly hire unauthorized workers face serious consequences," said Claude Arnold, special agent in charge for ICE Homeland Security Investigations in Los Angeles. "Targeting businesses that flout our nation's hiring laws is key to reducing the demand for illegal alien labor and protecting jobs for our country's lawful workforce."

The charges against the defendants stem from an investigation that began after ICE HSI received an anonymous tip that Brownwood furniture was using unauthorized labor. An audit of the company's hiring records in July 2009 revealed that 61 of the firm's 73 employees had submitted invalid documents to obtain their jobs. After ICE HSI notified the company about the discrepancies, the executives told investigators the unauthorized workers had been terminated. However, when ICE HSI agents executed a search warrant at the business in Dec. 2009, they encountered 30 unauthorized workers, 18 of whom had purportedly been terminated following the July audit.

In April 2009, Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano directed ICE to focus its worksite enforcement resources on the criminal prosecution of employers who knowingly hire illegal workers. In fiscal year 2010, ICE criminally charged a record-breaking 180 business owners, employers, managers and/or supervisors, up from 114 in fiscal year 2009 and 135 in fiscal year 2008. Additionally in fiscal year 2010, ICE conducted more than 2,200 I-9 audits - up from more than 1,400 in fiscal year 2009.

You may also visit us on [Facebook \(http://www.ice.gov/exec/leaving.asp?url=http://www.facebook.com/wwwicegov\)](http://www.ice.gov/exec/leaving.asp?url=http://www.facebook.com/wwwicegov), [Twitter \(http://www.ice.gov/exec/leaving.asp?url=http://twitter.com/wwwicegov\)](http://www.ice.gov/exec/leaving.asp?url=http://twitter.com/wwwicegov) and [YouTube \(http://www.ice.gov/exec/leaving.asp?url=http://www.youtube.com/wwwicegov\)](http://www.ice.gov/exec/leaving.asp?url=http://www.youtube.com/wwwicegov), or access this news release on your mobile device (<http://www.ice.gov/news/releases/1103/110308losangeles.htm?f=m>).

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.

ICE is a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities. For more information, visit www.ice.gov. To report suspicious activity, call 1-866-347-2423.