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News Releases

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Directors of Washington company plead guilty to felony immigration violations *Pair admits they allowed submission of false immigration forms for employees*

SEATTLE - Two corporate directors of Yamato Engine Specialists in Bellingham, Wash., pleaded guilty today in federal court to aiding and abetting the use of a false statement on immigration employment forms, following an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Shafique Amirali Dhanani, 46, and his sister, Shirin Dhanani Makalai, 52, each pleaded guilty to a federal felony, admitting that they knew workers at their family-owned company submitted false names and Social Security numbers on federal I-9 forms used to verify workers' status in the United States. Under the terms of the plea agreement, both defendants must be sentenced to a probationary sentence or they can withdraw from it.

"Today's guilty pleas demonstrate the commitment of ICE special agents to investigating leads, uncovering the facts, and holding criminal employers accountable," said ICE Assistant Secretary John Morton. "ICE will continue to investigate and find employers who flout our laws and hire illegal labor, in order to reduce the demand for illegal employment and protect employment opportunities for the nation's lawful workforce."

"This is Western Washington's first successful prosecution of an employer for knowingly hiring undocumented workers," said U.S. Attorney Jeffrey C. Sullivan. "This case should put employers on notice that if they knowingly employ those who lack legal status, they face prosecution for federal felonies."

According to his plea agreement, Dhanani serves as the production manager at Yamato and has been a director of the company since the 1990s. He admits that he knew of an employee, Jorge Collado-Sanchez, who was employed by Yamato in 2003, but left the company on Jan. 1, 2006, following an ICE audit of the company's I-9 forms in late 2005.

Furthermore, Dhanani admits he knew Collado-Sanchez returned to his job at Yamato in June 2006, completing the I-9 paperwork with documents that did not belong to him. Dhanani admits he knew an administrative employee of Yamato accepted the false documents and used them to satisfy the requirement that the company had checked the potential employee's legal status to work in the United States. Collado-Sanchez remained employed at Yamato until the ICE workplace enforcement action on Feb. 24, 2009.

In her plea agreement, Makalai states that she has been a director of Yamato since 2002 and is responsible for supervising the manager of the human resources department. She also admits that in November 2002, Ricardo Burgos-Quintanar completed an I-9 form in the name of Jose L. Garcia-Pallares using a resident alien green card that appeared genuine.

Five years later, Burgos-Quintanar completed a second I-9 as Ricardo Burgos-Quintanar, claiming he was a citizen of the United States and indicating that he was starting work for Yamato in March 2007. Makalai admits that she knew the human resources department engaged in a practice of using false information to complete the I-9 forms and took no steps to prevent or alter this practice.

According to the plea agreement, the corporation, Yamato Engine Specialists 1990, Ltd., is expected to pay a significant fine in connection with the case. Yamato has not yet entered a plea and is charged by information with encouraging and inducing illegal aliens to reside in the United States.

In all, 28 illegal aliens were found to be working unlawfully at Yamato. All have been put in removal proceedings, but allowed to remain in the United States as potential witnesses pending the conclusion of the case.

-- ICE --

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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