

15 arrested as U.S. immigration officials raid southwest Detroit box company

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The federal government sent a stern message to employers following a raid Tuesday in Detroit: If you hire illegal immigrants, we're coming after you.

A raid of a box company in southwest Detroit Tuesday led to arrests of a plant manager and 14 people who are suspected of working there illegally.

Edward Schlacht, 48, a supervisor at Grigg Box, was charged with knowingly hiring undocumented workers, authorities said.

The arrested employees weren't charged criminally, but will begin immigration proceedings, officials said.

Authorities said the arrests and raid should be a warning to employers.

"When other employers look at employers that we have prosecuted and convicted, that sends a crystal-clear message," said Brian Moskowitz, special agent in charge of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations. "When someone builds their business model on an illegal work force, that's something we can't tolerate."

Moskowitz said to combat illegal immigration, the government must remove a key incentive: jobs.

"You've heard it over and over again. Employment is a major draw for people who want to come to this country," Moskowitz said.

Tuesday's raid followed a months-long investigation into Grigg Box's hiring practices.

According to a criminal complaint filed in federal court, a federal audit of the company's hiring records in February identified 35 employees who used suspected counterfeit documents to get their jobs.

Authorities, with the help of a confidential informant, recorded Schlacht hiring a job applicant who admitted to not being authorized to work in the U.S.

Schlacht, who was charged with knowingly accepting false documentation in the course of hiring undocumented workers, was released on bond Tuesday. If convicted, he faces up to 10 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000.

Schlacht's attorney Rafael Villarruel declined to comment.

Grigg employee Tim Harris, a Detroitier who has been trucking boxes and wooden pallets for the company for six years, left for a delivery at 7 a.m. Tuesday and discovered the raid upon his return.

"I don't know nothing about that," he said as he pulled up from a trip to Westland. "I don't know what's going on."

A woman who answered the phone Tuesday at Grigg Box declined to comment.

<http://www.freep.com/article/20111130/NEWS01/111300360/15-arrested-U-S-immigration-officials-raid-southwest-Detroit-box-company?odyssey=mod|newswell|text|FRONTPAGEs>