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DHS Highlights Best Practices for Maintaining Legal Workforces
Unveils new industry partnership to help businesses make good hiring decisions

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) today announced a new initiative and best business practices to help employers ensure they are building legal workforce through voluntary partnerships with the government.

Called the ICE Mutual Agreement between Government and Employers (IMAGE), the program is designed to build cooperative relationships between government and businesses to strengthen hiring practices and reduce the unlawful employment of illegal aliens. The initiative also seeks to accomplish greater industry compliance and corporate due diligence through enhanced federal training and education of employers.

As the criminal prosecution of worksite violations has increased in recent years, DHS has been flooded by requests from employers seeking information on how to avoid hiring illegal aliens. IMAGE is a balanced and carefully designed partnership program that seeks to provide answers to these questions and help employers comply with the law.

"Any comprehensive strategy to stem the flow of illegal immigration must address the thousands of employers that hire illegal aliens both wittingly and unwittingly," said DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff. "We have been bringing a growing number of criminal prosecutions against unscrupulous employers; however prosecutions are only part of the solution. If the government is going to fully address the problem of illegal alien employment, it must partner with employers, educate them and provide them with the tools they need to develop a stable, legal workforce."

"Most employers want to comply with our nation's immigration laws. Yet, every day they are confronted with illegal aliens attempting to secure jobs through fraudulent means, including the presentation of counterfeit documents and stolen identities. Employers are not trained or obligated to be document detectives. Today, we are launching IMAGE to help employers deal with these situations and confidently develop a legal workforce," said Julie Myers, Assistant Secretary for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Under this program, ICE will partner with companies representing a broad cross section of industries in order that these firms may serve as charter members of IMAGE and liaisons to the larger business community. As part of this program, businesses must also adhere to a series of best practices including the use of the Basic Pilot Employment Verification Program, administered by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). To date more than 10,000 employers across the United States are using the Basic Pilot Employment Verification to check the work authorization of their newly hired employees.

"New employers are signing up to use the Employment Verification Program every day," said USCIS Director Emilio Gonzalez. "It's an indication that more and more employers are committed to making sound hiring decisions and in the process preventing unauthorized people from working in the United States."

What benefit does IMAGE hold for employers?

ICE will provide training and education to IMAGE partners on proper hiring procedures, fraudulent document detection and anti-discrimination laws. ICE will also share data with employers on the latest illegal schemes used to circumvent legal hiring processes. Furthermore, ICE will review the hiring and employment practices of IMAGE partners and work collaboratively with them to correct isolated, minor compliance issues that are detected.

Those companies that comply with the terms of IMAGE will become "IMAGE certified," a distinction that ICE believes will become an industry standard. Participation in IMAGE will help companies reduce unauthorized employment and minimize identity theft. An IMAGE participant can better protect the integrity of its workforce by helping ensure that employees are who they represent themselves to be.

What is expected from companies that seek to participate in IMAGE?

As a first step, companies must agree to a Form I-9 audit by ICE. They must also use the Basic Pilot Employment Verification program when hiring employees. This Internet-based system, which is free to employers and available in all 50 states, provides an automated link to federal databases to help employers determine the eligibility of new hires. For more information on this program and other USCIS verification programs, visit the USCIS web site at <https://www.vis-dhs.com/EmployerRegistration/>.

In order to become IMAGE-certified, partners must also adhere to a series of best practices. These include the creation of internal training programs for completing employment verification forms and detecting fraudulent documents. IMAGE partners must also arrange for audits by neutral parties and establish protocols for responding to no-match letters from the Social Security Administration. ICE is also asking employers to establish a tip line for employees to report violations and mechanisms for companies to self-report violations to ICE. A full list of best practices can be found at www.ice.gov.

DHS strongly encourages employers to review IMAGE program materials available at www.ice.gov.

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