

Immigration raid: Workers take care, take cover

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By JENNIFER JACOBS and JERRY PERKINS

Waterloo, Ia. - Iowa workers without legal documentation went into hiding Monday and rushed to fill out paperwork for the care of their children and property in anticipation of being arrested, lawyers and immigration rights workers said.

Rumors were flying in Waterloo, Storm Lake, Marshalltown and elsewhere that other raids would occur or that they had already taken place.

All appeared to be unfounded.

The criminal and civil warrants were issued only in Postville on Monday, said Barbara Gonzalez, a federal immigration spokeswoman from Miami who is in Waterloo this week.

"The arrests are based on intelligence and investigative leads, so I think that dispels those rumors," she said.

But word flashed through the Waterloo immigrant community that businesses such as Tyson Foods or Kaiser Contract Cleaning were targeted. Officials of both companies said that that was not true, and that they knew of no pending raids.

Other false rumors kept people from going to local stores because they heard federal officials would be there, asking for identification.

"We don't conduct random arrests," Gonzalez said.

Volunteers at El Centro Latinoamericano, a Latino resource center in Waterloo, said they were using announcements on La Buena, a radio station at 1250 AM, to try to squelch the rumor that ICE was knocking on doors of homes.

Meanwhile, hundreds of people were filling out paperwork: power of attorney documents to provide for care of children and property, and federal G-28 documents that allow an attorney to represent them in immigration court, lawyers said.

"People are panicky. They're in hiding," said immigration attorney Miryam Antúnez de Mayolo of Cedar Falls.

Some families were too scared to leave their homes, and some pulled their children out of school, said Carole Gustafson, president of the board of El Centro Latinoamericano and

an elementary schoolteacher.

Two Hispanic workers at Crystal Distribution Service in Waterloo took off for the day after they heard about the Postville raid, workers said.

"They gave other excuses, a sick relative or something, but we're going on the assumption that they're nervous about the raid," said Doug Hemesath, who works in human resources at Crystal.

Some Waterloo-area residents stopped by the National Cattle Congress complex in search of information. One woman, who declined to give her name, said she has children who are undocumented.

Rosalinda Ruiz of Waterloo said she came to the Cattle Congress grounds to see whether she could speak to Jesus and Marcos Rodriguez, who showed up for the morning shift at the Postville plant but haven't been heard from since.

A friend of a friend asked Ruiz to find out information for the Rodriguezes' families. Ruiz was not allowed inside.

About 500 people gathered at Queen of Peace Catholic Church in Waterloo Monday night. At least three lawyers were there until very late, answering questions.

"People are just so scared, you know?" said Ruiz, who works for a collection agency in Waterloo seeking payment on overdue medical bills.