

THE NEW YORK TIMES

July 27, 2006

U.S. Seeks Employers' Aid on Immigration

By JULIA PRESTON

Federal immigration authorities unveiled a program yesterday that is designed to induce employers to stop hiring illegal immigrants and to report those they find on their payrolls.

In return, employers would be certified by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency as having a clean bill of health on hiring.

Immigration officials in Washington announced the effort in response to growing alarm among employers about the agency's recent crackdown on companies that employ illegal immigrants. Federal immigration agents have brought federal criminal charges against some employers who were repeat violators, putting some of them in jail.

Under the new program, which is voluntary, employers must pass a series of hurdles to demonstrate that no illegal immigrants are among their employees and will then be certified as clean. They would have to submit to an audit of their employee records by immigration agents and join the Basic Pilot Employment Verification Program, a federal database that companies can use to confirm that employees' identification documents are not fraudulent.

Companies would also be expected to name a compliance officer to monitor the status of immigrant workers and to train their staff to verify documents.

Julie L. Myers, the homeland security assistant secretary who is the head of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, said that worried companies had come forward seeking a way to avoid problems with the agency. Under current law, employers are not required to scrutinize their employees' documents extensively.

Randel K. Johnson, a vice president at the United States Chamber of Commerce, said he doubted that many companies would join the new program.

"I don't think a lot of employers will sign up because there are a lot of hurdles, and no real carrot at the end of the process," Mr. Johnson said.