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Uproar Over 'Mass Firings' At Minn. Chipotle Restaurants

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By Lindsey Seavert, WCCO-TV

RICHFIELD (WCCO) – A Minnesota immigration rights group is protesting what it calls “mass firings” of Chipotle workers. According to the group, around 50 of the restaurant’s Latino workers have been fired in the last week.

The Minnesota Immigration Rights Action Committee (MIRAC), a local group that fights for the legalization of undocumented workers, says employees at local Chipotle stores came forward, saying they were fired over questions about their immigration status.

“We started to piece together there was something larger going on than a few people fired at one store,” said MIRAC member Brad Sigal. “It appears to be a statewide attack on immigrant worker who are longtime employees most of them been working there for years.”

Brad Sigal says his group confirmed that more than a dozen workers at the Chipotle store on Grand Avenue in St. Paul were let go, along with nearly dozen more at a Richfield Chipotle. He also heard from fired employees at locations in downtown Minneapolis (Skyway and Seven Corners), Golden Valley, Coon Rapids, Stillwater and Hudson, Wis.

Sigal says he suspects it’s the result of a federal immigration audit.

“It is an I-9 audit,” said Sigal. “They check the paperwork and fire anyone who can’t immediately prove they have the right to work. An action like this on a mass scale before the holidays is not consistent with the image they have cultivated.”

In a statement, Chipotle said, “We are fully cooperating with Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials in Minnesota in connection with a document request they have made.”

ICE officials have not yet made a statement.

Customers leaving Grand Avenue Chipotle offered conflicting views.

“I happen to be someone who is struggling to look for a job and I believe in fair practice,” said Tasha Scott, a St. Paul resident. “If I am eligible to work, and I have all the status and things required by law, I should have a job here.”

“I am an ethical vegan, I care about animals and humans,” said Melissa Swanson, a St. Paul resident who says she hopes she learns the truth. “If it doesn’t fit my ethics, we won’t be coming back.”