



News Releases

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Gulfport, MS

Howard Industries pleads guilty to employment-related immigration conspiracy

GULFPORT, Miss. - Howard Industries, Inc., one of the largest employers in Mississippi, pled guilty in federal court Thursday to knowingly violating the federal criminal conspiracy law in its employment of illegal aliens at the company's electrical transformer plant in Laurel, Miss., following an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

Howard Industries entered its guilty plea before U.S. District Judge Keith Starrett in federal district court in Hattiesburg, Miss. The announcement was made by U.S. Attorney John Dowdy, Southern District of Mississippi and Raymond R. Parmer, Jr., special agent in charge of ICE HSI in New Orleans.

The Howard Industries transformer manufacturing plant was the subject of an enforcement action by ICE HSI special agents on Aug. 25, 2008, that resulted in the administrative arrest of nearly 600 unlawful aliens working at the plant. In pleading guilty, the corporation admitted there was a conspiracy to encourage and induce illegal aliens to reside in the United States, even though the corporation knew or recklessly disregarded the fact that these illegal aliens lived here in violation of the law. The conspiracy also involved Howard Industries' concealing, harboring, and shielding from detection illegal aliens, knowing and in reckless disregard of the fact that such illegal aliens had come to, entered, or remained here in the United States in violation of law.

Howard Industries waived indictment, pled guilty to felony charges, and agreed to pay a criminal fine in the amount of \$2.5 million, an amount the corporation acknowledged is in excess of the fine amount ordinarily provided by statute for the single count of conviction. Under the federal conspiracy statute, a corporation is ordinarily subject to a term of not less than one and not more than five years of probation and a \$500,000 fine.

Previously, the company's human resources manager, Jose Humberto Gonzalez, pled guilty to a similar federal criminal conspiracy charge relating to the employment of unlawful aliens at the electrical transformer plant.

"ICE HSI aggressively targets egregious employers who knowingly and recklessly employ an illegal alien workforce," said Raymond R. Parmer, Jr., special agent in charge of ICE HSI in New Orleans. "This case serves as a stern warning about the consequences for employers who take jobs away from legal workers and gain an unfair economic advantage over their competitors. ICE HSI will investigate and pursue criminal charges against such employers and corporations."

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Gaines Cleveland and Mike Hurst are the prosecutors in charge of the case.