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Crackdown on Illegal Labor Intensifies

By [MIRIAM JORDAN](#)

The Obama administration intensified a crackdown on employers of illegal immigrants, notifying 1,000 companies Wednesday that they will be subjected to inspections of hiring records.

The surge brings the number of companies audited by immigration authorities to 2,338 in the fiscal year that began Oct. 1, surpassing last year's record 2,196. The total amount of fines levied against employers for breaking labor and immigration laws reached \$7.1 million compared with \$6.9 million for the entire previous fiscal year.

"These inspections will determine whether or not the businesses are violating U.S. employment laws by hiring illegal workers," said a statement by Gillian Christensen, a spokeswoman for Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

She said that employers of all sizes and in every state in the nation were notified to hand over I-9 employment-eligibility forms to ICE, a unit of the Department of Homeland Security, for an audit.

The agency didn't release the names of the businesses "due to the ongoing, law-enforcement sensitive nature of the inspections," said Mrs. Christensen.

The companies operate in areas defined as critical infrastructure and key resources, including food production, information technology, financial services and construction. Affected business might be involved in cargo handling, catering food for the military and construction of dams and highways, according to immigration lawyers.

The audits, which have affected garment makers, produce growers and fast-food chains, result in the firing of every illegal immigrant on a company's payroll. Companies say the audits undermine productivity and cost them thousands of dollars in legal fees.

"Because these audits can cost millions of dollars in lost productivity and attorney's fees, the government should move carefully and only when based on solid foundation that there is in fact illegal behavior," said Randy Johnson, a senior vice president at the U.S Chamber of Commerce.

"This type of action is a costly invasion and disruption," said DeAnn Hilgers, a Minneapolis attorney who specializes in I-9 compliance. "Despite their efforts to comply, businesses and their employees live under the constant threat of an ICE action while the government sits on its hands and provides no meaningful changes to help them."