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## **Months after raid, federal prosecutors charge Wash. company with hiring illegal immigrants**

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**Associated Press**  
**08/18/09**

**SEATTLE — Federal prosecutors filed charges Monday against a Washington state manufacturing company where 28 people were arrested in a February immigration raid, accusing the family-owned business of knowingly hiring illegal immigrants.**

Bellingham-based Yamato Engines Specialists was charged with conspiring to encourage undocumented immigrants to remain in the United States between 2006 and 2009. Prosecutors also charged two employees with allowing undocumented workers to file false employment forms with the government.

The raid at Yamato was the first since President Barack Obama took office and attracted national attention. Obama had signaled a desire to stop arresting workers in mass immigration raids and instead focus on prosecuting the companies that hired them.

Calls to Yamato Engine and to employee Shirin Dhanani Makalai's lawyer were not immediately returned Monday. A lawyer for employee Shafique Dhanani declined to comment.

The employees were expected to plead guilty on Tuesday.

Emily Langlie, spokeswoman for the U.S. attorney's office in Seattle, said the employees charged face the maximum sentence of five years in federal prison, a \$250,000 fine and three years of supervised release.

Of the 28 people arrested in February, 27 were given temporary permission to work in the United States while the investigation was pending. One worker agreed to leave the country, said Lorie Dankers, spokeswoman for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Seattle.

At the time of the raid, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials said the

workers obtained the jobs using fake Social Security numbers and other counterfeit documents.

In February, Makalai said she did not knowingly hire illegal immigrants. She said the raid came after months of cooperating with ICE on an audit, which included providing employee rosters to federal authorities. Makalai also said immigration agents had arrested 30 workers in 2006 after a separate raid.

Makalai and Dhanani are members of the family who owns the company. The family fled Uganda four decades ago and settled in British Columbia. They later moved the company to Bellingham and have been making engines there for almost two decades, employing more than 100 people.

Rosalinda Guillen, an immigrant advocate in Bellingham, said the work permits given to the workers were for the duration of the investigation. She now fears those work permits will expire.

"We were hoping the investigation would last longer, to be honest," Guillen said.

Guillen added most workers found odd and part-time jobs in the months since the raid.

In July, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement began notifying hundreds of businesses around the country of plans to audit I-9 forms, the employment eligibility documents that companies fill out for all workers, signaling a tougher stance on employers. Makalai has said that her company cooperated through all audits.