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Man sentenced for employing undocumented workers

Wednesday, September 16, 2009

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PHILADELPHIA — A Philadelphia man who operated car washes in Norristown and other area locations was sentenced Tuesday to one year of probation that includes six months' home confinement for his role in a scheme to employ illegal immigrants at the car washes, according to federal prosecutors.

Robert Kramer, 56, pleaded guilty, June 1 to employing at least 50 illegal immigrants, with "constructive knowledge" that they were not authorized to work in the United States.

From 2000 through March 13, 2006, Car Care employed undocumented workers at car washes under Kramer's supervision in Norristown, Flourtown and Bryn Mawr and in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

Kramer was general counsel of Mace Security International and chief operating officer of Car Care, Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of Mace Car Care operated more than 50 car washes in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware and three other states.

According to the federal information used to charge Kramer, Car Care hired undocumented workers, gave them the names of former employees, then paid the workers with checks bearing the names of the former workers.

Car Care owned both self-service and full-service car washes, including four full-service car washes in Norristown, Flourtown, Bryn Mawr and Cherry Hill, N.J. Though the self-service businesses had few employees, the full-service car washes employed numerous workers to assist in the cleaning, drying and detailing of cars.

Company workers in Norristown and elsewhere were paid by check and told to cash their checks at a local bank branch near the car wash. As a result of informal arrangements, the bank cashed checks for employees without requiring identification if those workers wore car wash T-shirts or sweatshirts, according to U.S. prosecutors.

U.S. District Court Judge Darnell C. Jones, II, ordered Kramer to pay a \$75,000 fine from his personal funds. Judge Jones also ordered the defendant to perform community service to consist of speaking to law students on the topics of corporate and professional responsibility.

The case was investigated by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Judy Goldstein Smith and Scott Cullen.

Beginning in 2003, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the agency of the federal government responsible for overseeing and regulating immigration in the U.S., including the enforcement of immigration laws in the workplace. Prior to 2003, the Immigration and Naturalization Service of the Department of Justice was responsible.

Employers in this country can legally hire only U.S. citizens and foreign nationals legally authorized to work here. All U.S. employers are required to complete and maintain

Employment Eligibility Verification forms ("Form I-9"). Prospective employees must complete the form to show that they are authorized to be employed in this country.