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ICE to Conduct I-9 Audits at 652 Businesses As Focus of Enforcement Shifts to  
Employers

**125 DLR A-6****Immigration****ICE to Conduct I-9 Audits at 652 Businesses  
As Focus of Enforcement Shifts to Employers**

The Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement July 1 announced that it was serving notices of inspection to 652 businesses nationwide as part of a new I-9 audit initiative to crack down on the hiring of illegal workers.

The 652 notices of inspection are more than ICE issued during the last fiscal year, the agency said. In fiscal year 2008, ICE issued 503 notices of inspection.

The notices alert business owners that ICE will be inspecting their hiring records to determine whether or not they are complying with employment eligibility verification laws and regulations.

According to ICE, such inspections are "one of the most powerful tools the federal government has to enforce employment and immigration laws." The renewed emphasis on I-9 audits "illustrates ICE's increased focus on holding employers accountable for their hiring practices and efforts to ensure a legal workforce," the agency said.

**ICE Says Audits Part of Broader Effort**

"ICE is committed to establishing a meaningful I-9 inspection program to promote compliance with the law," said John Morton, DHS's assistant secretary for ICE. "This nationwide effort is a first step in ICE's long-term strategy to address and deter illegal employment," he said.

The Immigration and Nationality Act requires that employers complete and retain an I-9 for all newly hired employees to verify their identity and authorization to work in the United States.

The form requires employers to review and record the individual's identity documents and determine whether the documents reasonably appear to be genuine and related to the individual.

The 652 businesses being presented with a notice of inspection were selected as the result of leads and information obtained through other investigative means, ICE said. Due to the ongoing, sensitive nature of the audits ICE declined to reveal the names and locations of the businesses that will be audited.

DHS April 30 issued new enforcement guidelines changing the department's focus to be more on criminal prosecution of businesses hiring illegal immigrants and less on workplace raids to pick up undocumented workers (82 DLR A-4, 5/1/09).

As part of that overall strategy, ICE is "focusing its resources on the auditing and investigation of employers suspected of cultivating illegal workplaces by knowingly employing illegal workers," the agency said.

The "nationwide initiative" to audit the 652 businesses is "a direct result of this new strategy," ICE said.

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