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Undercover worker aided agents

By JEFF REINITZ, Courier Staff Writer

POSTVILLE --- Monday's immigration raid at Agriprocessors was the result of almost eight months of investigation, according to U.S. Attorney Matt Dummermuth.

The probe included interviews with former illegal workers and an undercover source who landed a job at the plant and sometimes wore a recording device, court records show.

The numbers alone are interesting.

Agents with the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement said Agriprocessors had 833 workers with suspicious Social Security numbers pulling a paycheck in the third quarter of 2007.

All 833 employees were found to have either used invalid Social Security numbers or numbers not their own, said an application ICE agents submitted to secure a search warrant of the facility.

An ICE analysis of the numbers estimated that 76 percent of the 968 workers at Agriprocessors in the fourth quarter of 2007 were using bogus Social Security numbers.

Agents sought criminal complaints and arrest warrants for 697 Agriprocessors employees.

More than 300 were detained as of 2 p.m. Monday, officials reported, and buses continued to roll onto the National Cattle Congress grounds after dark.

Wired

About 12 of the search warrant application's 52 pages detail the efforts of a confidential source to get a job at Agriprocessors and what he saw inside.

Referred to only as Source No. 7, the undercover operative first tried to get hired at the plant in early November without a Social Security card and was turned down.

He then followed a tip that a certain supervisor would hire him without documents. During a meeting at the supervisor's house, he was told he should "fix" his Social Security number to be able to work.

In December, Source No. 7 returned to the plant with a counterfeit Social Security card and a bogus permanent resident alien card provided by ICE agents. A human resources worker told him the numbers and name didn't match and again rejected him.

The source talked to another person who was turned down for bad documents and received the phone number of a person in California who was supposed to be able to obtain good papers. The California man told the source that others who tried to pass the papers at Agriprocessors weren't successful because the company had become strict in its hiring process.

Finally in January, ICE officials gave Source No. 7 a valid Social Security card to use while applying at the plant. The number was different from the bogus card he tried to pass in December, but he used the same name as before, according to court records.

He was hired to hang cattle at the plant for \$7.25 an hour --- minus \$2 per week for mandatory safety equipment --- and then went on to wear a wire during orientation.

The search warrant application described how a human resources employee instructed a group of new workers how to check the different boxes of their I-9 employment eligibility form based on their citizenship status.

At this point, the new employees began to laugh, records state.

Source No. 7 continued his employment at Agriprocessors until at least April. During that time he heard that employees who didn't have good documents didn't use swipe cards and biometric devices that worked as electronic time cards. They also received paychecks that were a different color.

In February, Source No. 7 told ICE agents about a incident where a floor supervisor duct-taped the eyes of a worker who was apparently an undocumented Guatemalan and hit him with a meat hook.

"Source #7 asked the Guatemalan to report this incident to the front office, but the Guatemalan stated that it would not do any good and could jeopardize his job," records state.

The undercover source also heard about a character known only as "Mr. Boss," who was a Postville resident and was in charge of the different colored checks received by undocumented workers at the plant.

Another source in the investigation was a former supervisor who said he was fired after breaking up a methamphetamine lab in the plant. He told of an incident where three employees had Social Security cards with the same number.