

# Government rewarding firms checking immigrant status

By SUZANNE GAMBOA (AP) – November 19, 2009

WASHINGTON — The Homeland Security Department will give a "seal of approval" to businesses volunteering to use an electronic program to check workers' immigration status.

Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano said Thursday the public should know which companies are following the law. The problem is, the program known as E-Verify is still under development and the law does not require employers to use it. They are required to use a paper system.

In addition, some businesses that use E-Verify have been found to have hired undocumented workers who used stolen, fraudulent or borrowed documents. About 169,000 employers use E-Verify. There are about 7 million employers in the U.S. Napolitano made the announcement at an employers meeting about immigration enforcement in Washington.

The E-Verify program "will let consumers know which businesses are working hard to follow the law and are committed to protecting employment opportunities," Napolitano said.

The approval seal Napolitano unveiled has large letters on it that say I E-Verify, with a waving American flag. Below it, in smaller letters, the label says "This business uses E-Verify in its hiring processes to achieve a lawful work force." Although DHS has been working to shrink the error rate of E-Verify, it does sometimes flag legal workers as illegal. The program also cannot determine if someone is using bogus documents.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement started a similar program in 2007 known as ICE Image, although that program had other requirements including that the employer undergo an audit of the employer's paperwork, known as I-9's, used to check workers' immigration status.

Congress gave DHS \$137 million to run E-Verify another three years. Information on how many more employers could participate in the program with that amount was not immediately available. An attempt to make the program permanent was rejected, but is likely to be proposed again as part of the Democrats' immigration reform bill.

Immigration lawyer Scott Wright of Minneapolis, who attended the meeting, said the E-Verify seal "is grooming the business community and the public to get into the mindset" of what is to come.