

INS Arrests 71 During 2 Raids in Maryland; Tips Pointed Agents To Bladensburg Firms

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Body

In simultaneous **raids**, federal **agents** hit two **Bladensburg** businesses yesterday, **arresting 71** workers suspected of being illegal immigrants and bringing the total **arrested** this year in **Maryland** to 188, more than double the number **arrested** in the same period last year.

Acting on a series of **tips** and armed with search warrants, 30 Immigration and Naturalization Service **agents** sealed off a commercial laundry and a chicken processing plant in an industrial park in the 5200 block of Monroe Place **during** the midday **raids**.

Taken into custody at Nutech Laundry & Textiles were 31 workers, while at nearby Poultry Processing Inc., **agents** **arrested** 40 employees. Most of those **arrested** were women. INS officials said 56 suspects were from Mexico and the rest were from other Latin American countries.

The suspects, ranging in age from 18 to 50, were taken in detention buses to an INS holding facility in suburban Baltimore for processing. Officials said they expected most to be released last night on bonds ranging from \$ 5,000 to \$ 15,000, pending deportation and other proceedings.

Those with children, officials said, were allowed to telephone relatives to arrange for child care. One mother who had a sick child on a respirator was released on her own recognizance, officials said.

The **raids** marked the latest in a series of **raids** in the Washington-Baltimore area fueled by a glut of **tips**, many anonymous, coming into the INS District Office in Baltimore.

"I've got more than 300 leads on my desk right now for Prince George's County and Montgomery County alone," said Benedict Ferro, INS district director. "We're targeting only the most aggravated cases."

Most of the 188 suspected illegal immigrants **arrested** in **Maryland** this year have been from Central or South America, raising complaints from advocacy groups that the INS is unfairly targeting Hispanic workers. Ferro and other officials deny that **arrests** are selective, saying **agents** rely heavily on anonymous leads about undocumented workers.

Ferro noted in an interview yesterday that a large percentage of **Maryland's** foreign-born population -- both legal and illegal - comes from Latin America. And unlike many others, who generally must have visas and airline tickets that are screened before entry into the United States, he said, foreigners from Latin America "can walk across the Mexican border and be in downtown Baltimore in 72 hours."

INS spokesman John Shallman said the **arrests** this year involved 27 work sites where employers are subject to INS sanctions, including fines of up to \$ **2,000** for each illegal worker knowingly hired.

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About 10 INS **agents** **raided** Nutech. Some of the **agents** trained their handguns on terrified workers, said a company official who saw part of the **raid**.

The official said that one **agent**, who was not displaying a badge or wearing any identifying clothing, waved a gun at workers who were hiding in laundry bins and ordered them, in English, to come out.

The **arrested** workers were led away in handcuffs and manacles, Nutech workers said. The **raid** occurred on a street of red brick and concrete industrial buildings.

Under federal immigration law, employers are required to ask prospective employees to show documentation that they can work legally, but the employers are not required to verify those papers.

Nutech's president, Jack Robinson, said each of the 31 employees **arrested** yesterday had shown documentation.

"They're all honest employees," Robinson said. "They all pay taxes. They all have Social Security withheld. None are paid in cash."

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