

ALIENS' PHONY DEADLINE

INS RULES EVEN CONFUSE ITSELF

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Body

The new immigration laws scheduled to go into effect tomorrow will not mean "mass deportations," immigration officials have promised.

But they were less clear on exactly what the change will mean.

Uncertainty in the minds of undocumented aliens had set off a stampede to the altar by illegals hoping to secure their status by marrying citizens or legal residents.

There was also a blizzard of applications for green cards in advance of tomorrow, even though the Immigration and Naturalization Service repeatedly said April 1 was meaningless for weddings and green cards.

Tomorrow is not a deadline of any kind for most undocumented aliens, Paul Virtue of the INS said last week.

It is merely the day that the clock starts, giving people here without proper visas 180 days to legalize their status or face a three-year wait to apply for legal entry if they are caught and deported.

The real deadline for aliens without valid visas is Sept. 30, Virtue said.

The new law also provides for a 10-year waiting period for anyone caught living here illegally for 365 days, starting from tomorrow.

The countdown doesn't apply at all to people under 18, asylum applicants, people filing under the battered-spouse provision and some family members of permanent residents who applied under immigration amnesty.

INS Deputy Commissioner Chris Sale said the new law will provide "useful new tools" for policing entries into the country and removing illegal aliens.

Not all provisions of the new law will go into effect tomorrow because new rules for enforcing them have not yet been written.

It is also possible that none of the provisions will go into effect.

U.S. District Judge Emmet Sullivan promised last week to rule by today on a request from the American Civil Liberties Union and the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights that implementation of the new law be put off 30 days.

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The lawsuit, which was filed in Washington on behalf of four immigrant-rights organizations, asks for a temporary restraining order against the INS because the government failed to meet its statutory obligation to provide 30 days' notice before the rules take effect.

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