

S.C. Textile Firm Fined Record \$\$580,000 for Hiring Illegal Aliens

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Body

Federal immigration authorities today levied a record **\$580,000 fine** on a **South Carolina textile** company **accused** of **hiring** scores of **illegal aliens**, including a 12-year-old boy.

The administrative **fine** on Piedmont Quilting Corp. of Walhalla, **S.C.**, is the largest under the 1986 law that contains criminal and civil penalties for knowingly employing **illegal aliens**, the Immigration and Naturalization Service said.

One INS official said working conditions for three children "almost bordered on bondage."

The agency's announcement came a day after the company and 11 officers and managers were indicted in Greenville, **S.C.**, on federal criminal charges related to the **hiring** of 117 **illegal aliens** from Mexico and Peru.

The administrative **fine** covers the employment of 85 **illegal aliens**, including a 12-year-old boy, INS said. The **fine** also covers the company's failure to comply with procedures to verify that more than 400 employees were not **illegal aliens**, it said.

"This is in defiance of the congressional mandate to prevent **illegal aliens** from obtaining employment in this country," INS Commissioner Gene McNary said in a statement.

McNary said the agency's action "should be a clear sign to those who have any doubts that the Immigration and Naturalization Service is strongly committed to enforcing the employer sanctions" in the 1986 law.

The criminal charges resulted from a six-month investigation of conditions at the company that included placement of an INS undercover agent as a plant employee, said Thomas P. Fischer, director of the agency's district office in Atlanta.

When INS agents raided the plant last July 17, they found three Mexican boys, two aged 15 and another 12, working on the plant, Fischer said in a telephone interview.

"It almost bordered on bondage when you look at the age of these people," he said. "They were being paid in cash, there was no documentation."

The indictment filed Tuesday charged that Piedmont Quilting knowingly **hired** and recruited **illegal aliens** for employment, Assistant U.S. Attorney David Stephens said Tuesday in Greenville.

Indicted on that charge were company owner Alfred Mizhir, 55; his wife, Gail Mizhir, 30, both of Spring Lake, N.J.; and nine other individuals, including several Hispanic legal employees of the plant.

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Piedmont Quilting's attorney has said the illegal aliens presented the company with false documentation in order to get hired.

Federal agents raided the company last July in what was called the biggest crackdown on the employment of illegal aliens outside south Florida.

The indictment also includes 117 counts of harboring illegal aliens. Those charges are against the company, its owners and the same individuals named in the first count.

Two additional counts charge the company, its owners and plant employees Eugene Scarpa of Greenville and Mary Hill of Seneca, S.C., with making false statements on quarterly wage reports.

Establishing a practice of hiring illegal aliens carries a maximum fine of \$\$3,000 per alien plus six months' imprisonment, Stephens said.

The penalty for harboring illegal aliens and for making false statements on quarterly reports is up to five years imprisonment and \$\$250,000 in fines per count, he said.

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