

Investigators Find 10 More Illegal Workers Involved With School Site

By [Nikie Mayo](#), Anderson Independent Mail

ANDERSON — State investigators have found 10 more illegal-immigrant workers employed by the construction company that was just evicted from a Pickens County school system job site. So far, those investigators have determined that at least half of the employees at Land Construction of Seneca are illegal workers.

The company, which has been doing masonry on the school system's new career and technology center, has employed at least 15 illegal workers, according to the S.C. Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation. Five of those workers were discovered a few weeks ago and fired, and 10 more were discovered Wednesday after state investigators were allowed access to the company's employment records. All of the workers have been reported to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Company President Edward Land said Wednesday night that he has been cooperating with the state's investigation and that laws for verifying a worker's immigration status have changed since he hired the workers in question. He said several of those workers have been with him for more than a decade, and at least one has worked for him for 17 years.

Land's crew was ordered off the job site on Chastain Road in Liberty after Superintendent Henry Hunt said school district officials had been told the company had "failed to provide access" to state investigators. Jim Knight, administrator of the state labor department's Office of Immigrant Worker Compliance, said it was only after school officials acted that Land pledged to cooperate.

Knight said state investigators examined records of the company's 24 remaining employees Wednesday. He said 13 of those workers had "permanent resident cards," but when those cards were run through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's database, 10 of them were found to be fraudulent documents.

Knight said the company's other 11 workers all had South Carolina drivers' licenses, and state investigators are still reviewing those to determine whether they are legitimate.

The state labor department's Office of Immigrant Worker Compliance has been investigating work sites in the Pickens County school district since November 2009, after receiving numerous complaints that illegal workers were being hired for construction projects.

The law, according to the state Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation, requires a company to complete a federal employment eligibility verification form for each worker hired. Within five days of hiring a worker, a company must verify the person's work authorization through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security or verify that the worker has a valid South Carolina driver's license or identification card.

Land said several times in an interview Wednesday that he had no means of electronically verifying a worker's status when his employees were hired years ago. He said his company reviewed the workers' documentation when they were hired and filed the appropriate federal forms.

He said he always paid the appropriate withholding taxes for the workers, and he wonders why, if there was a problem, the state didn't find it and notify him years ago.

"These men have families, they have children, they have been in this community for years," Land said. "What happens to them now?"

Changes in state law in July expanded the authority of the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation. It now monitors companies with fewer than 100 workers to ensure that the employees are legal workers.

By law, Land is required to fire the illegal workers. He said he has given them three days to respond to the allegations that they are illegal and to prove otherwise.

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