

PRESS RELEASE

El Cajon Company and its and Human Resources Manager Plead Guilty to Engaging in Practice of Employing Aliens; Company to Forfeit More than \$200,000

Wednesday, November 26, 2025

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of California

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SAN DIEGO – El Cajon-based San Diego Powder & Protective Coatings and the company's hiring manager, Karli Buxton, pleaded guilty in federal court today to engaging in a pattern or practice of hiring undocumented immigrants without authorization to work in the United States. The plea follows a worksite enforcement action which occurred on March 27, 2025, at San Diego Powder & Protective Coatings' facility.

The company, a government contractor, also agreed to forfeit \$230,000 that it gained from engaging in the practice.

As part of the plea agreement, the company admitted that its operations manager, John Washburn, and others recruited undocumented immigrants who did not have authorization to work in the United States. Washburn pleaded guilty in June.

Since 2023, Buxton was responsible for verifying that new employees were eligible to work in the United States. As part of her plea agreement, she admitted that she was aware certain employees were presenting fraudulent documents to show their authorization to work in the United States, but she accepted the documents and hired them for employment at the company.

The company further admitted that it had frequently sent employees to work in secure locations such as military bases or ports of entry and avoided sending any employees working illegally to these secure locations where they would be subject to further screening. The company also admitted the aliens it employed in its warehouses often had access to military equipment such as components for submarines or aquatic vehicles used by the United States Navy.

As part of its plea agreement, the company agreed to participate in the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Mutual Agreement between Government and Employers (IMAGE) program. The IMAGE program serves the business community by strengthening hiring and employment verification practices by providing guidance on topics such as the use of fraudulent documents and forced labor. IMAGE program participants agree to submit to an audit of their Form I-9s (Employment Eligibility Verification Form) to ensure the integrity of their workforce and that they are only employing individuals authorized to work in the United States. As part of its plea agreement, the company also agreed to use the E-Verify system to check the eligibility of all new employees for the next two years.

"Here's my advice to the business community and to the lawyers who advise them: enroll in IMAGE," said U.S. Attorney Adam Gordon, "There are numerous tangible benefits to enrolling your company in IMAGE and ensuring the integrity of your workforce. The Department of Justice has and will continue to prioritize investigations into businesses that are employing individuals without authorization to work in the United States."

"Worksite enforcement operations like these deter illegal immigration, ensure employer accountability, and protect the US Workforce," said HSI Acting Special Agent in Charge Kevin Murphy. "HSI is committed to investigations that hold companies like SDPC accountable for their criminal actions."

"Bypassing required vetting processes and exposing Department of the Navy resources and information to individuals with insufficient or fraudulent documentation threatens warfighter safety," said Special Agent in Charge Greg Gross, NCIS Economic Crimes Field Office. "NCIS and our partners remain dedicated to safeguarding Department of Navy installations, personnel, and assets against any threat to our national security."

These cases are being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Henry F.B. Beshar and Michael A. Deshong.

DEFENDANT

Case Number 25 CR 4519

BJS & T Enterprises Inc.,

Db a San Diego Powder & Protective Coating

Karli Buxton

Age: 41

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Engaging in a Pattern or Practice of Employing Aliens, in violation of Title 8 U.S.C. § 1324a(a)(1)(A) and (f); Maximum Penalty: Six months in prison; \$3,000 fine per alien.

INVESTIGATING AGENCIES

Homeland Security Investigations

Naval Criminal Investigative Service

U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General

General Services Administration, Office of Inspector General

Small Business Administration, Office of Inspector General

Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General

Enforcement and Removal Operations, Department of Homeland Security

Drug Enforcement Administration

Bureau Alcohol, Tobacco Firearms and Explosives

U.S. Border Patrol

U.S. Customs and Border Protection

This case is part of [Operation Take Back America](#) a nationwide initiative that marshals the full resources of the Department of Justice to repel the invasion of illegal immigration, achieve the total elimination of cartels and transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), and protect our communities from the perpetrators of violent crime.

Contact

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