

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Wisconsin

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rusk County Man Pleads Guilty to False Statements to Federal Agencies Regarding Non-Citizen Workers

MADISON, WIS. – A Bruce, Wisconsin man has pleaded guilty to making false material statements to the U.S. Department of Labor and to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, concerning workers from other countries hired to perform labor in the United States. Alfredo Aguilar, 52, pleaded guilty today in U.S. District Court in Madison, Wisconsin. The guilty plea is announced by Timothy M. O'Shea, United States Attorney for the Western District of Wisconsin.

According to the plea agreement, from 2015 until December 2018 Aguilar was a co-owner of Northwoods Forestry, Inc., a business based in Eleva, Wisconsin. Aguilar recruited workers from Mexico and Central America, known as H-2B workers, to work in forestry by planting and caring for trees and clearing and developing woodland. Through the H-2B program, employers are permitted to hire temporary workers from other countries to perform labor to address one-time, seasonal, intermittent, or peak needs. Northwoods Forestry agents made statements and attestations under oath to the Department of Labor and USCIS regarding the type of work the workers would do and the wages they would receive.

Aguilar admitted that he placed Northwoods Forestry H-2B workers with non-forestry employers, including in meat packing, construction, roofing, agriculture, painting, fur processing, and landscaping businesses, and that he assured those employers that the H-2B employees could legally work at their businesses when he knew that was not true. Aguilar also admitted that Northwoods Forestry did not pay the workers the highest applicable wages, did not pay the workers overtime, deducted the cost of safety boots from the wages of employees sent to work in meat packing, and deducted expenses and subsistence for transportation to and from the United States from the H-2B employees' pay, all contrary to their sworn statements to the Department of Labor.

As part of Aguilar's plea agreement, Aguilar will pay restitution to the H-2B workers in the amount of \$1,144,693.56 and a civil penalty in the amount of \$210,696.39.

Chief U.S. District Judge James D. Peterson scheduled sentencing for April 19, 2023, at 9:30 a.m. Aguilar faces a maximum penalty of 5 years in federal prison.

"My office is committed to partnering with the Department of Labor to protect the rights of all workers," said U.S. Attorney O'Shea. "We will work with our federal colleagues to bring to justice those who seek to exploit vulnerable workers."

"Alfredo Aguilar conspired with others to abuse the H-2B program by making false statements to the U.S. Department of Labor and by failing to provide foreign workers with the wages and benefits they were entitled to receive. We will continue to work with the U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division to vigorously pursue those who commit fraud involving foreign labor certification programs," said Irene Lindow, Special Agent-in-Charge, Chicago Region, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General.

The investigation in this matter was conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General and Wage and Hour Division, with assistance from the U.S. Department of State and the Wisconsin Department of Justice Division of Criminal Investigation. U.S. Attorney O'Shea is handling the prosecution.

Topic(s):
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