

Monday, January 18, 2010

Social Security rarely uses E-Verify

[Stephen Dinan](#)

Despite helping run the government's electronic database designed to weed out illegal-immigrant workers, Social Security failed to run E-Verify checks on its own employees nearly 20 percent of the time.

An audit by the Social Security Administration's inspector general says the agency outright failed to check 19 percent of its hires in 2008 and 2009, and of the checks it did run, nearly half of them weren't performed in a timely manner.

It's all the more embarrassing because the agency, along with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, runs E-Verify, the tool the government expects to become mandatory for all U.S. businesses.

"It's telling, I suppose, that an agency that should be tops at implementing E-Verify is missing some major pieces of it," said Jim Harper, director of information policy studies at the Cato Institute, who has been a longtime critic of the program. "Here's an organization that is expected to understand government processes, and it hasn't done so. I don't see it as fair to expect the public at large to do 100 percent better."

Some businesses and immigrant rights groups have balked at using E-Verify, arguing that its error rate is too high. But other businesses and many lawmakers have embraced E-Verify as a way to prove to authorities and to customers that they are trying to keep a legal work force.

Social Security officials didn't return a message seeking comment about the audit.

In an official response submitted to the inspector general, Social Security officials said they accepted all of the inspector general's criticisms. But the response also said the officials

disagreed with the finding that every new hire must be screened.

Bill Wright, a spokesman for USCIS, which administers E-Verify, wouldn't comment on the audit but said his agency is working on tools to help businesses use the system.

"USCIS is committed to ensuring that all employers and agencies enrolled in E-Verify use the program properly, and we are continuing to develop compliance assistance resources to help them," he said.

Employers run the name of a new hire through E-Verify, and the system sends back either a confirmation that the employee is authorized to work in the U.S. or a tentative non-confirmation. Employees then have a chance to resolve the problem, which in some cases results from something as simple as a failure to alert the government about a name change after marriage.

In other cases, though, the employee is not authorized to work in the U.S.

Employers are not supposed to run names through the database before hiring someone because of the chance of error in initial non-confirmations.

The audit said Social Security hired 9,311 people in 2008 and 2009 but failed to run E-Verify checks on 1,767 of them.

Of the others, the agency ran E-Verify checks on 1,874 people too early, in violation of the terms of use. Those terms also specify that employers must begin the E-Verify check within three days of the date they hire someone. Social Security ran checks on another 1,784 hires after three days.

Of the 19 percent of names that were never checked at all, the audit said, 44 of them should have been flagged as potential problems.

The Obama and Bush administrations pushed E-Verify as a key component to helping businesses hire legal workers.

All federal agencies are required to check their new hires against the system. As of September, federal contractors also are required to check new employees. Some states have gone so far as to require all businesses to check new employees.

A mandatory verification system is almost certain to be a part of any immigration bill enacted in Congress, and the penalties for failure to use the system are likely to be severe.

"When this happens in the government sector, well, the upshot is an IG report. But in the private sector, you're talking about investigations and penalties," Mr. Harper said.

Ads by Google 

[Verify SSN](#)

[Canada Immigration](#)

[Income Tax Filing](#)

[USA Immigration](#)

[Immigration Services](#)