



The Obama administration has replaced immigration raids at factories and farms with a quieter enforcement strategy: sending federal agents to scour companies' records for illegal immigrant workers.

While the sweeps of the past commonly led to the deportation of such workers, the "silent raids," as employers call the audits, usually result in the workers being fired, but in many cases they are not deported.

Over the past year, Immigration and Customs Enforcement has conducted audits of employee files at more than 2,900 companies. The agency has levied a record \$3 million in civil fines so far this year on businesses that hired unauthorized immigrants, according to official figures. Thousands of those workers have been fired, immigrant groups estimate.

Employers say the audits reach more companies than the work-site roundups of the administration of President George W. Bush. The audits force businesses to fire every suspected illegal immigrant on the payroll— not just those who happened to be on duty at the time of a raid — and make it much harder to hire other unauthorized workers as replacements. Auditing is "a far more effective enforcement tool," said Mike Gempler, executive director of the Washington Growers League, which includes many worried fruit growers.

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