

Is your security guard an illegal alien?

by Terence Jeffrey, townhall.com

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Is the private security guard watching over your home or office an illegal alien? If so, is the government doing enough to fix the problem?

These questions must be asked because the inspector general of the Social Security Administration has discovered that a California-based security guard company employed 4,321 people in 2001 whom the company did not correctly identify on W-2 forms, often an indicator that a worker is an illegal alien.

The IG's office, however, believes current law prevents it from identifying this company not only to the public but also to the Department of Homeland Security and the State of California.

Security guards to train for terror

By Steve Geissinger, Oakland Tribune

SACRAMENTO — With the infamous Sept. 11 date approaching again, the U.S. and state homeland security offices have launched twin strategies to recruit more than 500,000 private counterterrorism agents in California, officials acknowledged Monday.

Last month, state-licensed security guards, who vastly outnumber law enforcement officers and believe their image has improved with better training, began receiving antiterrorism instruction.

Later this month when the Legislature reconvenes, lawmakers expect to quickly pass a bill requiring "proprietary" security guards — those employed directly by businesses — to undergo the same training and extensive background checks as those working under contract through security firms.

Lawmakers believe Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger will sign the bill, in part because it meshes with his administration's new antiterrorism training for state-licensed security officers.

Charlene Zettel, director of the Department of Consumer Affairs, which oversees the private-security industry, said, "It's vital for the security industry in California and across the nation to have a heightened awareness of terrorist activity in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

"In many cases, the demands of homeland security have stretched law enforcement agencies very thin," said Zettel.

"Our hope is to provide an optimally trained (private) work force that can quickly and effectively meet the challenges of suspicious activity at homes and businesses, parking lots, ports, shopping malls and other facilities, wherever Californians gather," she said.

The four-hour class, given by private security schools, consists of a DVD and workbook developed to teach guards what to look for and how to react in the event of an unfolding terrorist attack. As part of the course, students even invent their own plot for use by domestic or foreign terrorists.



Perspective security guards will receive the course as part of their required 40 hours of training to join the pool of about 200,000 existing officers who work under contract with security firms. Already-licensed guards will receive the training as part of continuing education that is required annually.

At the same time, the state is moving toward licensing the estimated 300,000 "proprietary" guards who work directly for a variety of business, ranging from hotels to shopping malls.

Not only will the officers receive counter-terrorism training, but any who are felons will be weeded out by the state's scrutiny of their backgrounds through record checks with the FBI, the state Justice Department, and the state Department of Mental Health.

"This bill is important to improve consumer protection, ensure public safety and prevent convicted felons from being employed as security guards by private employers," said Sen. Abel Maldonado, the author of the bill.

The Santa Maria Republican, whose district extends to the southern reaches of the Bay Area, said the measure "will close a longstanding loophole in existing law, which allows security personnel who are not working under contract to evade existing training and background check requirements for private security guards."

The proposal, introduced every year since 2001, has been defeated amid opposition from the California Retailers Association and the Motion Picture Association of America.

But this year, supporters and foes hammered out a deal that gives businesses extra time to fully implement the measure and exempts guards employed directly by movie studios.

The California Association of Licensed Security Agencies, Guards and Associates, which sponsored the bill, says that "California has made great progress in professionalizing private security over the years."

"But in the wake of the terrorist attacks on the United States, California public policy has recognized the important role of private security by dramatically increasing background checks and training requirements in the field.

"This bill is necessary to ensure standards for all private security personnel," the association says.

Security guards are under renewed scrutiny with bill

By Steve Geissinger, Oakland Tribune

SACRAMENTO — A child gets lost in a shopping mall, hotel or arena, anywhere in California, and runs into the arms of a uniformed security guard — who turns out to be a felon or convicted child molester.

It could happen due to a little-known loophole in the law, and legislators are trying, again, to fix the problem.

"There's people working in the business who shouldn't be working in the business because they're felons," said Terry Wingert of the Advanced Security Institute, one of California's foremost private-security schools.

In-house security officers aren't registered with the state so they don't undergo government background checks and training. Big business has crushed past attempts to close the gap in the law because of the cost.

This year, a lawmaker expects to close the loophole, but only after softening provisions that would have made businesses put their guards through the training that's mandatory for contract officers from security firms.

State-licensed, contract security guards, who vastly outnumber law enforcement officers and believe their image has improved with better training, even began receiving anti-terrorism instruction last month as part of their initial 40-hour course.

But it's unclear whether in-house officers, working directly for shopping malls and other businesses, will undergo even the initial eight hours that includes the counter-terrorism training. State regulators say they will provide the terrorism and arrest-powers curriculum free, in hopes businesses seize the opportunity.

Despite softening of SB 194, the bill's author, Sen. Abel Maldonado, R-Santa Maria, views the measure's approval in the Senate and advance toward Assembly passage as a significant victory since it would still require in-house guards to be registered with the state and undergo extensive criminal background checks.

Such checks aren't available to businesses now, whether they provide in-house training of some kind or not.

"Our No. 1 concern, in addition to terrorism and security threats at the mall or the store, is that you could have a lost kid running into the arms of Chester the Molester — a convicted offender," said a spokesman for Maldonado.

Maldonado and the California Association of Licensed Security Agencies, Guards and Associates, which is sponsoring the bill, dropped the training mandate, partly out of concern it would lead to a veto by Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

The film industry was part of the opposition, led by the California Retailers Association. Representatives of the association, which has apparently dropped its opposition with deletion of training requirements, did not return calls.

Schwarzenegger has not taken a position on the bill, as is his custom with most legislation before it reaches his desk. But Maldonado is hopeful.

"This bill may not be perfect," said Kise, "but we don't want to sacrifice the perfect for the good. Little kids see the uniform, and that's who we teach them to go to. This bill will be a victory for little kids, and moms and dads."

Businesses directly employing guards currently don't have access to the broad background checks by the FBI and state justice and mental health departments.

"Even a responsible, proprietary security force that wanted to, right now, because a number of rules and lawsuits, would not have access to the best background check available because of privacy issues," said Jeff Flint of the California Association of Licensed Security Agencies, Guards and Associates.

Meanwhile, it's likely the deleted, mandatory-training provisions of SB 194 for in-house security will be introduced again in a future legislative session, as it has in past sessions, according to the security association.

More than three-quarters of California's buildings, power facilities and other vital structures are in private hands, watched over by security guards. There are about 200,000 contract guards and about 300,000 in-house officers.

All told, that's a half-million "additional eyes and ears out there to observe suspicious activity, compared to about 90,000 sworn law enforcement officers in California," said Steve Giorgi, deputy director of the Department of Consumer Affairs, which oversees guard licensing.

With the department offering the new anti-terrorism training curriculum at no cost, state officials said they hope businesses voluntarily require the course for their guards. If they don't, it's possible the department might impose the training on in-house guards through regulations.

"Our lobbyist will push for such regulations," said Flint, who represents the security association.

The Department of Consumer Affairs last month began requiring contract officers' training to include a section on what to look for, and who to alert if they, for instance, see a mysterious package, someone dressed inappropriately for the season, a person taking pictures of a facility or any other suspicious activity.

"It's a simple concept, but it's like a 10 times increase in the number of eyes and ears out there," said Gary Winuk, chief deputy director of the governor's Office of Homeland Security. "It's all about seeing something that doesn't look right."

Contract guards who are currently employed also will get the training, which includes sections on potential terrorist weapons, including weapons of mass destruction, and how to respond in the event of a terrorist attack.

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WHEN DOES CONTINUING EDUCATION START?

Q: I am still confused about when I need to start providing continuing education to my officers. When do I start for my pre-7/1/04 officers? And how about my new officers?

A: As most everyone know, AB 2880 mandated 40 hours of training for all new officers, starting after July 1, 2004. Additionally, all officers, whether pre-7/1/04 or not, must do eight hours of annual continuing education.

But as to when to start this ACE, this question has been a source of some confusion for many PPOs in California, so you are not the only one wondering about this.

CALSAGA contacted George Paddeck, the Training and Enforcement Manager at the Bureau of Security and Investigative Services (BSIS), and asked him for the official word. Here it is.

First of all, Paddeck clarified that Continuing Education will be regulated on a calendar year basis rather than the dates surrounding each officer's "guard card" renewal date.

For any pre-7/1/2004 security officer in California, which are the officers who do not need to take the 40 hours of AB 2880 training, these officers must start their continuing education in the 2005 calendar year.

For post 7/1/2004 officers, who underwent the AB 2880 basic training, the calculation of the start year for ACE is as follows:

- Calculate the six month deadline date by which the officer in question must have completed

their AB 2880 training (six months after date of hire).

- The officer in question must start undergoing continuing education the calendar year after this deadline date.

Thus, officers hired from 7/1/04 to 6/30/05 must start Continuing education in calendar year 2006. Officers hired after 7/1/2005 must start CE in calendar year 2007.

BSIS is requesting, but not currently mandating, that officers who have not received the WMD training do so in their first CE cycle.

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