

Star Ledger

Feds mandate expanded use of controversial E-Verify program to check the backgrounds of immigrant workers

Posted by J. Scott Orr June 16, 2008 12:30PM

The federal government has begun requiring vetting the immigration status of millions of workers by a controversial online data search system that has been criticized as inaccurate and easily abused.

The E-Verify system, a voluntary program until last week, instantly compares workers' identification information with millions of records stored at the Social Security Administration and the Department of Homeland Security.

The government announced it was making the program mandatory for employees of all federal contractors, and a key lawmaker is working to expand the mandate to include all the nation's employers.

To immigrant advocates, the system was troublesome enough when it was voluntary. Making it mandatory for federal contractors, they say, will only make a bad situation worse by forcing its use in industries that make up a \$400 billion-plus sector of the economy.

The advocates charge the system is full of inaccurate data, that it generates false negative results, that employers abuse the system and that it does nothing to address the increasing need for workers to fill low-wage jobs.

"The system doesn't work. It has been demonstrated time and again to be filled with so many holes and inaccuracies that this new mandate will create absolute bedlam," said Charles "Shai" Goldstein, executive director of the New Jersey Immigration Policy Network, based in Newark. "The system is a mess."