

9 Companies Accused of Underpaying Employees

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LA. TIMES
2-5-85

By BILL RITTER,
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Federal authorities on Monday accused nine firms and individuals of violating "prevailing wage" laws by underpaying workers at several local construction projects over a two-year period.

The firms are believed to have underpaid 256 workers a total of \$712,401 when they worked on federally contracted projects in San Diego in 1982 and 1983, according to Assistant U.S. Atty. Eve Bermingham, who coordinated the yearlong investigation.

Eight of the firms were based in San Diego at the time of the violations, she said.

Each of the companies faces one criminal charge of making a false statement to a federal department or agency, which carries a maximum prison sentence of five years and a fine of up to \$10,000.

In addition, the owner of one of the companies, Alan Jay Bianco of Bianco Welding in Oceanside, was indicted by a federal grand jury Friday on 15 charges of filing false payroll reports and taking kickbacks from public works employees.

The charges are local prosecutors' attempts to enforce the Davis-Bacon Act, passed by Congress in 1931 to guarantee that workers on federally contracted projects are paid the prevailing wage in that particular area.

The legal action is not only designed to penalize offenders and recover wages, but also to protect honest contractors from losing jobs because they pay legal wages.

"We're (also) concerned about the legitimate contractors who bid using prevailing wages and always lose out to the guy who bids low,"

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said Bermingham. "Some contractors don't even bid anymore because they know they're going to get low-balled."

The firms had stated in documents to the Department of Labor that they were paying the prevailing wage to their workers. Instead, authorities contend, the firms

pocketed the difference.

In addition to Bianco Welding, the named firms were Meredith-Worley Inc. of Vista, Thomas Electric of El Cajon, United Constructors of El Cajon, Rainbow Construction of Hemet, Hacienda Landscape of Lemon Grove, Baker Electrician of San Diego, RGR of Ramona and TWN of San Diego.

The contracts included work on San Diego freeways, low-income housing and military facilities.