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U.S. Attorney's Office

Eastern District of Pennsylvania

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Asplundh Tree Experts, Co. Pleads Guilty To Unlawful Employment Of Aliens

PHILADELPHIA –Asplundh Tree Experts, Co., one of the largest privately-held companies in the United States, headquartered in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania (“Asplundh”), pleaded guilty today to unlawfully employing aliens, in connection with a scheme in which the highest levels of Asplundh management remained willfully blind while lower level managers hired and rehired employees they knew to be ineligible to work in the United States, announced acting United States Attorney Louis D. Lappen. Following the guilty plea hearing today, the Honorable John R. Padova sentenced the company to pay a forfeiture money judgment in the amount of \$80,000,000.00 and abide by an Administrative Compliance Agreement, as set forth by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Philadelphia. Pursuant to a separate Civil Settlement Agreement, Asplundh will pay an additional \$15,000,000.00 to satisfy civil claims arising out of their failure to comply with immigration law.

The \$95,000,000.00 recovery, including \$80,000,000.00 criminal forfeiture money judgment and \$15,000,000.00 in civil payment, represents the largest payment ever levied in an immigration case.

According to court documents, from 2010 until December 2014, Asplundh, an industry leader in tree trimming and brush clearance for power and gas lines, hired and rehired employees in many regions in the United States accepting identification documents it knew to be false and fraudulent. A six-year HSI audit and investigation revealed that the company decentralized its hiring so Sponsors (the highest levels of management) could remain willfully blind while Supervisors and General Foremen (2nd and 3rd level supervisors) hired ineligible workers, including unauthorized aliens, in the field. Hiring was by word of mouth referrals rather than through any systematic application process. This manner of hiring enabled Supervisors and General Foremen to hire a work force that was readily available and at their disposal.

This decentralized model tacitly perpetuated fraudulent hiring practices that, in turn, maximized

productivity and profit. With a motivated work force, including unauthorized aliens willing to be relocated and respond to weather related events around the nation, Asplundh had crews which were easily mobilized that enabled them to dominate the market. Asplundh provided all the incentives to managers to skirt immigration law.

"Our partners at U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Philadelphia are to be commended for their work on this lengthy audit and investigation, spanning 6 years," said Acting United States Attorney Louis D. Lappen. "Today's settlement and the compliance agreement makes it clear, that companies must play by the rules and treat everyone fairly."

"Today marks the end of a lengthy investigation by ICE Homeland Security Investigations into hiring violations committed by the highest levels of Asplundh's organization," said ICE Acting Director Thomas Homan. "Today's judgment sends a strong, clear message to employers who scheme to hire and retain a workforce of illegal immigrants: we will find you and hold you accountable. Violators who manipulate hiring laws are a pull factor for illegal immigration, and we will continue to take action to remove this magnet."

The case was investigated by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Philadelphia and is being prosecuted by Special Assistant United States Attorney Josh A. Davison and Assistant United States Attorney L.C. Wright.

Component(s):

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