

U.S. Department of Justice

*United States Attorney
Eastern District of Virginia*

*World Trade Center 757/441-6331
Suite 8000, 101 West Main Street*

News Release

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
Deanna Warren (775-441-6331)

Paul J. McNulty, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, announced today the arrest of 20 individuals who worked at the Norfolk International Airport, as part of an anti-terrorism, airport security initiative. In addition, one individual was arrested as a fugitive from justice on state charges and one was detained as an INS violator. An additional 9 were arrested today in a similar operation conducted at the Richmond International Airport.

The airport security initiative was started in April 2002 when 97 arrests were made of employees working at the Ronald Reagan Washington National and the Dulles International Airports in Northern Virginia. Since the inception of this initiative, a total of 127 individuals have been arrested at airports in the Eastern District of Virginia. These current and former employees either lied on their applications to obtain restricted access security badges at the airport; were wanted on outstanding state warrants; or were in violation of Immigration and Naturalization Service requirements and unauthorized to work at the airport.

A federal grand jury returned indictments against the individuals arrested today on May 22 and June 5, 2002. The charges include Social Security fraud and falsifying criminal history records.

Officials from the following agencies participated in the announcement:

- Federal Bureau of Investigation
- U.S. Department of Transportation, Office of Inspector General
- U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service
- U.S. Marshals Service
- Norfolk International Airport Authority

In January 2002, the Joint Terrorism Task force (JTTF) of the FBI began working with the Norfolk International Airport Authority police and the Newport News-Williamsburg International Airport police to determine if current and former employees working at the airports had obtained their restricted access badges by fraud or material false statements. Employment records for all employees who held Security Identification Display Area (SIDA) badges were examined to determine the veracity of the information they contained. SIDA badges are required to obtain access to secure areas within the airport. The badges are obtained by employees based on information they provide when they apply for the badge.

Records for 3,386 individuals working at Norfolk International Airport and 199 individuals working at Newport News-Williamsburg International Airport were examined. Criminal history checks were also run on these employees. The records of each employee for whom discrepancies were found were then reviewed by the Joint Terrorism Task Force to determine whether criminal charges or referral to another agency were appropriate. As a result of this investigation, 21 individuals were indicted, 6 individuals were identified as fugitives on outstanding state warrants and 3 individuals were found to be in violation of INS regulations and unauthorized to work at the airport.

The individuals arrested in this operation worked in a variety of jobs at the Norfolk International Airport. Each charge carries a potential maximum penalty of 5 years imprisonment, \$250,000 fine, and 3 years supervised release, depending on the charge. Passenger services at the airports were not interrupted during this operation.

Mr. McNulty said, "These indictments show that we take airport security seriously. Those who work at our airports are entrusted with a great responsibility. My office is determined to work with law enforcement agencies in the Hampton Road community to see that this trust is earned and deserved in all of our airports. We are committed to do all that is possible to protect the public from future acts of terrorism. Today, I am happy to say that Norfolk International Airport is a safer place for both the traveling public and the employees who work there."

Assistant United States Attorney Mike Smythers coordinated the operation on behalf of the United States Attorney's Office in Norfolk.