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Foreign workers critical to sustaining Guam's construction industry

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By Nestor Licanto [CONNECT](#)

Officials are trying to head off a potentially-crippling development in the local construction industry. The labor department says 80% of the H2 visa applications by Guam contractors to bring in foreign workers are in jeopardy. And without those alien laborers, millions of dollars in construction projects would be put on hold.

Local contractors have been coming forward with case after case in which the US Citizenship and Immigration Service has issued requests for evidence, which labor officials say are usually red flags for denial. "Employers would have the right to appeal, appeals normally take about a year though, so in essence what happens is most employers would lose their H2 workforce," explained Greg Massey of the Alien Labor Processing Division.

He says this level of scrutiny has never happened before, adding, "There's been no change in regulation, there's been no change in policy, there's been no change in statute, so we don't know."

What they do know is that there's been a nationwide slowdown in H2 visa approvals. But what's puzzling is that Guam was exempted from the yearly cap of \$66,000, specifically because of the expected military buildup. Almost 2,000 visa applications are in the balance, and some \$285 million in construction projects.

"There is a core group of US skilled workers in the construction trades in Guam, but not to the levels of what we need to handle a lot of the military construction," Massey said. "If we don't get those H2 workers in for the buildup, I don't know how these projects are going to get built."

He says both the governor and the congresswoman are working their contacts in Washington to try and head-off any potential problems. He could not say if the Defense Department might also get involved.

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