

# First group of H-2B employees from Mexico arriving on Guam this month

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Building materials and contract workers can be seen within the Finegayan Utilities and Site Improvements Phase 1 project site, just off of Route 3 in Dededo, on Thursday, Oct. 24, 2019. (Photo: Rick Cruz/PDN)

Some contractors are looking beyond the Philippines for workforce needs.

Guam Pacific Mechanical and Electrical is bringing in 10 H-2B workers from Mexico this month, according to Greg Massey, administrator with the Guam Department of Labor.

This is the first batch of construction workers from Mexico arriving for contracts on Guam in Massey's 30 years with the department.

"Those guys should be in this month, we're hoping," Massey said. "We do know they got approved... We're kind of excited about getting some diversity in the (H-2B) workforce."

"What happens if something happens with the Philippines? Let's say the Philippines president decides well I'm not going to let my citizens come to the U.S. anymore – what are the contractors going to do? We need that second supply of workers."



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Korea and China used to supplement Guam's construction labor pool, however, China was removed from the list of approved countries for H-2B visas, Massey said.

"Korea is just a matter of wage rates. Wage rates are a little bit higher in Korea than they are here," he said.

The 10 H-2B employees from Mexico will work as electricians on a military project, according to Massey.

## Philippines ban



Fence Masters employees install piping for a perimeter fence near the Finegayan Utilities and Site Improvements Phase 1 project site, just off of Route 3 in Dededo, on Thursday, Oct. 24, 2019. (Photo: Rick Cruz/PDN)

The Department of Homeland Security last year announced that the Philippines is no longer on the list of countries eligible to send workers to the U.S. under the federal H-2A and H-2B programs.

[This sparked concern among contractors \(/story/money/2019/02/06/h-2-b-bans-have-far-reaching-impact-says-guam-contractors-association/2775204002/\)](#), adding further hurdles to the already restricted H-2B visa situation on island. The Guam Department of Labor later [hosted a workshop with Veronica Birkenstock \(/story/news/local/2019/05/06/contractors-may-consider-h-2-b-visa-workers-mexico/1114947001/\)](#), president and CEO of Practical Employee Solutions, to explore the potential of recruiting labor from Mexico.

Mexico is the largest source of H-2B visa workers in the U.S., according to [Birkenstock in May. \(/story/news/local/2019/05/06/contractors-may-consider-h-2-b-visa-workers-mexico/1114947001/\)](#)

Contractors at the time expressed mixed feelings regarding branching out their H-2B worker pools to Mexico.

## More H-2B news

- [Contractors express mixed feelings on sourcing H-2B visa workers from Mexico \(/story/money/2019/05/07/h-2-b-visa-workers-companies-mixed-feelings-sourcing-mexico/1124068001/\)](#)
- [Contractors may consider H-2B visa workers from Mexico \(/story/news/local/2019/05/06/contractors-may-consider-h-2-b-visa-workers-mexico/1114947001/\)](#)
- [H-2B bans have far reaching impact, says Guam Contractors Association \(/story/money/2019/02/06/h-2-b-bans-have-far-reaching-impact-says-guam-contractors-association/2775204002/\)](#)
- [GDOL: 100% approval rate for H-2B visas under National Defense Authorization Act \(/story/money/2020/01/15/h-2-b-visa-approval-guam-national-defense-authorization-act/4463218002/\)](#)

JMI Edison president Eduardo Ilaio stated last year that he'd be interested in exploring the option but was hesitant in regards to costs, such as increased airfare.

Mark Mamczarz, vice president of accounting and finance at Black Construction, said last year that language barriers and cultural gaps are issues too large to consider recruiting from Mexico.

The list of approved countries for H-2B visas will be revisited and revised late this month, and the ban on the Philippines may be lifted, but it isn't likely, according to Massey.

"We hope the Philippines is back on the list, but I'm not going to hold my breath. We probably won't get Philippines back on the list for a few years," Massey said during a [Guam Contractors Association meeting Wednesday. \(/story/money/2020/01/15/h-2-b-visa-approval-guam-national-defense-authorization-act/4463218002/\)](#)

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Even if the Philippines H-2B ban is lifted, Guam Department of Labor Director [David Dell'Isola](#) has made clear (</story/news/local/2019/05/06/contractors-may-consider-h-2-b-visa-workers-mexico/1114947001/>) that Guam must ultimately diversify its H-2B workforce, as relying on a single country is too risky.

Guam Pacific Mechanical and Electrical declined to comment.

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