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## Agencies: H-2 denials still a problem

Despite handful of approvals

John O'Connor | Post News Staff 5 hrs ago



**APPROVALS:** Greg Massey, administrator of the Guam Department of Labor's Alien Labor Processing and Certification Division, discusses H-2B temporary worker visa approvals at a Rotary Club of Tumon Bay meeting. File photo

There has been a small surge in H-2B temporary worker visa approvals in the last week. Immigration attorney Ladd Bauman said his office received approval for the importation of 13 H-2B workers on Sept. 20 for a large construction company. The approval marks a slight deviation from the nearly 10 percent denial rate local companies have had to contend with in the last nine months. But according to Greg Massey, administrator of the Guam Department of Labor's Alien Labor Processing and Certification Division, the uptick is likely nothing more than an anomaly in the larger scale of Guam's

temporary labor shortages.

"Until we get three or four or five (approvals), then we can say something's happening," he said.

Guam companies have had difficulty receiving approval for temporary labor visa petitions since early this year. Government officials have warned that the shortage of H-2B workers will create complications, not just in increasing military construction projects but for local infrastructure projects as well.

The \$100 million procurement for the renovation and rehabilitation of public schools has been somewhat delayed because of an ongoing protest by Core Tech International Corp. The company is appealing its case with the Office of Public Accountability and several documents have surfaced as result of the appeal, including letters of substantial interest from GovGuam agencies involved in the procurement.

A substantial interest declaration would have given the government an avenue to move forward with the procurement process but it lacked the necessary approval from the attorney general. Regardless the letters contain a draft memo from John Calanayan, an engineer with the Department of Public Works – the lead agency in this procurement.

Renovating Simon Sanchez High School is the top priority for the \$100 million project and among the issues Calanayan identifies as contributing to the delay is concern with the availability of labor and concern with H-2B workers.

### **Ongoing loss**

Calanayan said these factors were included because of the ongoing loss of temporary workers. There were about 1,200 H-2B workers on Guam in July, but Massey has indicated that the number could fall below 100 by year's end as visas expire without replacements.

The school renovation project isn't the first time DPW has expressed concern about H-2B workers for a major project. A major road improvement project awarded recently only received one bidder when the department would normally receive three or four responses, according to DPW Director Glenn Leon Guerrero.

"We have heard from the construction community that they're hesitant to bid on projects if they can't

be sure they have enough of a labor force," he said.

Joanne Brown, general manager of the Port Authority of Guam, said she had heard from BBR Micronesia Corp., the company performing roof repairs on the port's administration building, that it needed to seek out additional workers because the visas for several H-2B workers expired during the project.

At this point, the port has no major projects, but it does have several upcoming projects in mind with potential approval of rate increases.

"The concern for us is with future projects that we're going to enter into, primarily to ensure that there is an adequate work force to do the work," Brown said. "If we get approval for those projects outlined and the situation doesn't change, we would be impacted by that."

Peter John Camacho, CEO of Guam Memorial Hospital, stated in a report to the hospital board of trustees that during the 60th Pacific Island Health Officers Association executive board meeting in Hawaii, he raised the issue of H-2B denials "which is having a detrimental impact especially for Guam's health care system and our ability to hire qualified health professionals across all specialties."

Camacho said he relayed the challenges GMH and Guam Regional Medical City were facing relative to staffing.

When asked about GMH's status with regard to temporary labor, a hospital spokesman said there were no H-2B workers currently on staff.

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**John O'Connor**

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