

First batch of new H-2B workers arrives on Guam after nearly 3 years

Haidee V Eugenio, Pacific Daily News Published 4:05 p.m. ChT June 13, 2018



(Photo: Frank San Nicolas/Pacific Marketplace)

Guam on Wednesday welcomed 45 skilled foreign workers for military construction projects, the first new batch to arrive since the federal government started in late 2015 a blanket denial of H-2B petitions for the island.

The denials eventually led to Guam having no H-2B workers as of early May 2018, from about 1,500 annually in years past.

More: [Gov. Eddie Calvo: Guam has no H-2B workers \(/story/news/2018/05/15/gov-eddie-calvo-guam-has-no-h-2-b-workers/609989002/\)](/story/news/2018/05/15/gov-eddie-calvo-guam-has-no-h-2-b-workers/609989002/)

More: [Feds approve 162 H-2B workers for Guam \(/story/news/2018/03/30/feds-approve-162-h-2-b-workers-guam/472207002/\)](/story/news/2018/03/30/feds-approve-162-h-2-b-workers-guam/472207002/)

The 45 newly arrived H-2B workers from the Philippines will be working on the hangar projects on Andersen Air Force Base amounting to more than \$200 million, according to PHC Corp. general manager Jong Won.

PHC Corp. is a subcontractor for a joint venture of Core Tech International, Amec Foster Wheeler and SK Construction, Won said.

"We are happy that workers are now on island. But without personnel ID from military, they can't proceed working on base but the military said they will be expediting that," Won said.

Workers expected to arrive every other week

PHC Corp. expects that there will be a new batch of H-2B workers arriving every other week, until they reach the 333 workers they have been approved for.

Of the 45 newly arrived workers, 17 are cement masons, 11 are carpenters, eight are iron workers, four are heavy equipment operators, two are mechanics, two are electricians, and one is a plumber, Won said.

The Guam Department of Labor expects to begin registration of the new H-2B workers in the next few days.

A total of 654 H-2B workers have been approved as of Wednesday, the governor's office said.

'Moving the economy forward'

"This is the first of several groups to arrive on Guam and it means that construction projects that have been delayed will be able to move forward, which in turn will move our economy forward," Gov. Eddie Calvo said in a statement.

The governor's office said there were as many as 1,500 foreign skilled workers on Guam but in 2015, the federal government started denying requests for new H-2B visas.

More: [Court orders H-2B class suit notice to be sent out by June 15 \(/story/news/2018/05/31/court-orders-h-2-b-class-suit-notice-sent-out-june-15/658426002/\)](#)

More: [Feds approve more foreign labor for Andersen hangar project \(/story/news/2018/04/20/feds-approve-more-foreign-labor-andersen-hangar-project/535083002/\)](#)

Guam Labor Director Sam Mabini said the department is happy that the first workers have finally arrived to help supplement the local skilled workforce.

"The Department of Labor Alien Labor Processing and Certification Division is gearing up for the drastically increased workload that will come with the arrival of more and more workers," she said.

'Help alleviate our workforce shortage'

The H-2B workers approved for military projects came as a result of the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act language that Guam Del. Madeleine Bordallo secured, providing flexibility to admit foreign skilled workers for projects directly connected to or associated with the Marine realignment on Guam.

"This is exactly what my provision was intended to do, to help alleviate our workforce shortage. The arrival of these H-2B workers is positive news, and I appreciate the One Guam effort we are making to resolve Guam's labor challenges," Bordallo said in a statement.

She said she looks forward to more workers coming to Guam to ease the pressure on the construction industry.

"I am committed to working in Congress to build on this progress and providing a broad solution that will benefit our entire civilian community outside the fence," she added.

The Defense Act allows Guam to have up to 4,000 H-2B workers a year for military realignment projects.

No H-2Bs for civilian projects yet

While H-2B visa petitions have already been approved for military projects, nothing has so far been approved for other projects involving hotels, houses or hospitals.

Lt. Gov. Ray Tenorio said efforts continue with respect to getting H-2B visa approvals for civilian projects.

"While the news is positive, Tan Maria down the street should be able to hire a construction team to build her outdoor kitchen at an affordable price. We continue to push the One Guam approach and remind U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services that what's good for on base is good for the civilian population," Tenorio said.

A 2016 lawsuit filed by the Guam Contractors Association and nearly a dozen other businesses also yielded positive results for employers trying to hire H-2B workers for non-military projects.

However, USCIS has yet to approve a single H-2B petition for non-military projects on Guam.

More: [Andersen Air Force Base on Guam: What to know \(/story/news/2018/06/13/andersen-air-force-base-guam-what-know/696916002/\)](#)

More: [GPD receives shooting threat; man in viral photo says it's not him \(/story/news/2018/06/13/gpd-receives-shooting-threat-says-stay-vigilant/697004002/\)](#)

Reporter Haidee Eugenio covers Guam's Catholic church issues, education, government, business and more. Follow her on Twitter [@haidee_eugenio](https://twitter.com/haidee_eugenio) (https://twitter.com/haidee_eugenio). Follow Pacific Daily News on Facebook/GuamPDN (<http://www.facebook.com/guampdn/>) and Instagram [@guampdn](http://instagram.com/GuamPDN) (<http://instagram.com/GuamPDN>).

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