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## **Illegal Aliens in Maintenance Raise Safety Questions**

No matter the size of the maintenance company or operation, there are laws that must be followed when hiring new personnel to work for U.S.-based companies. In addition to the legal requirements, there are also practical considerations: is the technician properly qualified, trained, and able to perform at the high level required for the job?

"High-quality screening methods are essential," said Douglas Anweiler, vice president, corporate marketing and communications at staffing company Reliance Aerotech Services.

Reliance, which provides contract maintenance personnel to maintenance organizations, checks the background of all potential employees, according to Ron Jordan, general manager. The checks include verification of employment eligibility (I-9 form), validation of the prospect's social security number, and checking the applicant's FAA certificate status. After these checks, the company also has background and criminal records checks done, using a third-party provider.

The criminal background checks "can be tricky," said Jordan, because there is no way to crosscheck records between different states. The federal criminal records check is simpler, but one would have to check every state to see if the applicant had a record in that state.

"It's difficult," said Jordan, "because these guys travel all the time, they're kind of nomadic. They could have committed crimes in all 50 states. We try to focus on the federal check and a state check in the home of record."

The cost of a background check varies, he added, "depending on how deep you want to go." Reliance can adjust the level of background checking based on the customer's level of risk. A technician working with lots of supervision in an area where security isn't an issue might not need as deep a background check. But, with less supervision available, he said, "you probably need to crank the quality of the screening process up higher."

"You save money by having quality personnel," concluded Reliance Aerotech's Anweiler, "that's the bottom line. It's tough getting that across when everyone wants to cut costs relentlessly, but that's what the industry needs to look at."

At L-3 Vertex Aerospace, which specializes in military and government aircraft maintenance personnel, "we start with what everybody is supposed to start with," said Bill Grosvenor, human resources director. L-3 Vertex can hire only U.S. citizens or permanent resident aliens, which excludes aliens with work visas.



L-3 Vertex checks the applicant's I-9 employment eligibility verification form then has a background check done by a third-party vendor. "We check and verify the social security number, date of birth, residency, and the last two employers," said Grosvenor. "In the background check, we verify that the social security number is really theirs. It confirms they are who they say they are." L-3 Vertex also has a criminal background check done on the applicant.

"Background checks aren't free," Grosvenor said. "They cost anywhere from \$60 to \$200 a person. We don't do it until we determine we want to hire them and make them an offer. We make a contingent offer, if they pass the drug screen and background check. If they don't pass either, the job offer is null and void."

Any size maintenance company needs to check job applicants's backgrounds, Grosvenor emphasized. "Anybody that doesn't go through at least a minimum background check--residency, past employment, validation of social security number--is taking an extreme risk. It's kind of a last check to validate your gut feel that you've got the right guy."

**BY MATT THURBER, EDITOR**