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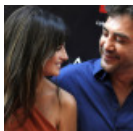
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# Employer blacklist empty despite labour complaints from foreign workers

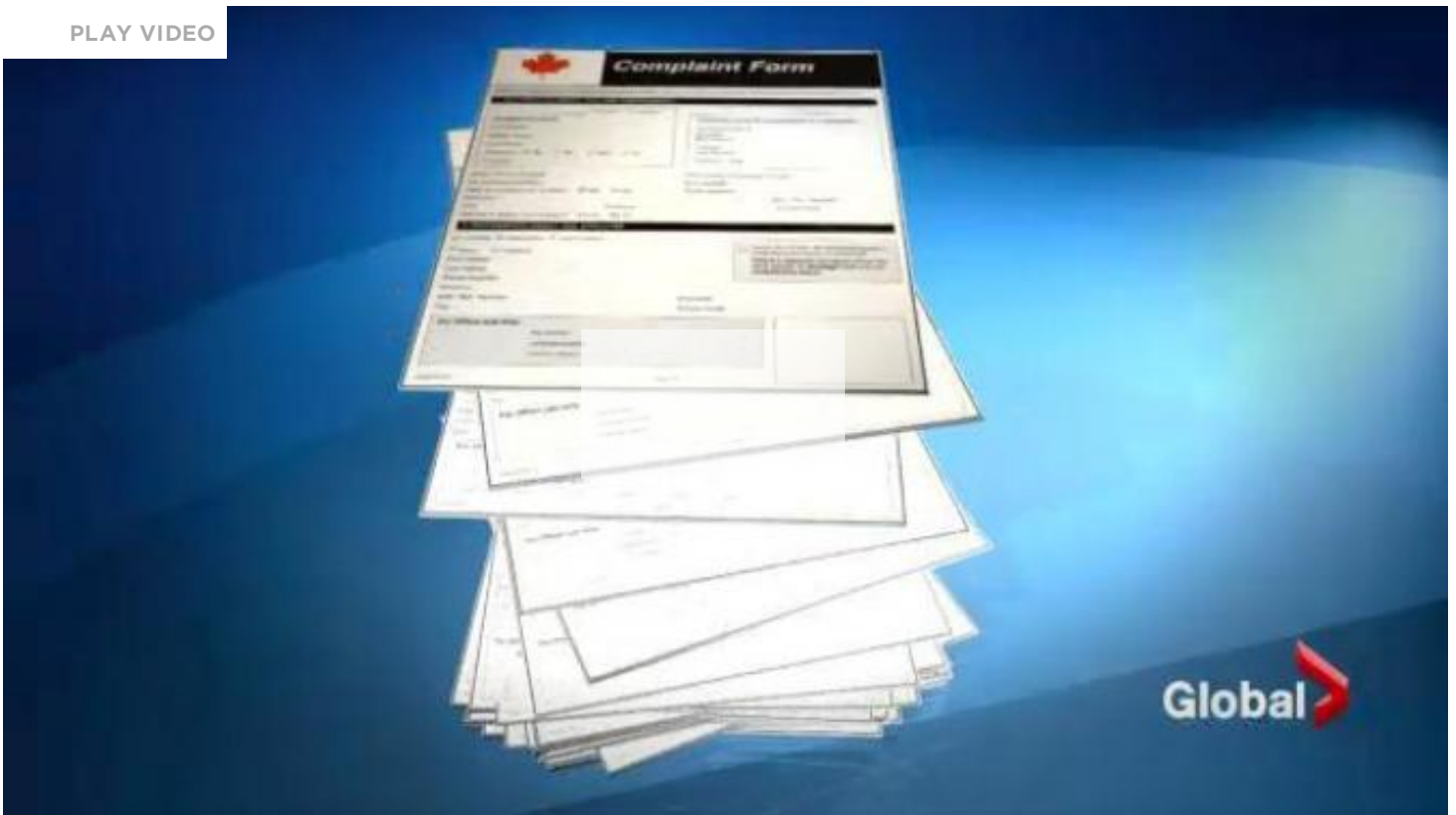
By Rebecca Lindell Global News

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OTTAWA – More than 200 temporary foreign workers in Alberta have complained about payroll violations, but none of their employers have been publicly named by Ottawa.

Canada has more than 330,000 temporary foreign workers, with 68,319 of them in Alberta to help stem the labour shortages caused by the resource boom.

Last year, 218 temporary foreign workers in Alberta complained to the provincial government about labour standards violations, according to numbers released by the Alberta Federation of Labour.

Of those investigated, 47 per cent were found to be legitimate contraventions.

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Employers who break the rules or fail to live up to their job offer are supposed to be publicly blacklisted by the federal government, who is responsible for Canada's temporary foreign worker program. In applying to bring a temporary foreign worker, employers also promise to abide by local employment laws.

But the list of ineligible employers on Citizenship and Immigration Canada's website remains empty.

"It seems to be a ploy," said Siobahn Vipond of the Alberta Federation of Labour. "If you don't put anybody on it, don't bother having the list."

The statistics from Alberta show getting on that federal list isn't as simple as getting caught by the province.

Employers have to be actively seeking to hire a new temporary foreign worker in order for an immigration official to initiate an investigation that could land them on the ineligibility list.

That means employers currently abusing temporary foreign workers may not face the consequences unless they try to recruit more of them.

Citizenship and Immigration said it is aware of employers who would be blacklisted if they tried to hire more temporary foreign workers.

And the department credits the threat of public naming for preventing such employers from trying to hire additional employees.

The empty list points to an abject failure of the federal government to administer the program, according to NDP MP Jinny Sims.

"If you have a bad employer exploiting very vulnerable people who come to this country trying to make a living, then there has to be consequences," she said.

"And that blank page on the website shows there are no consequences."



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But newly-minted Labour Minister Kellie Leitch disagrees, pointing to tighter rules proposed this spring.

“We have had concerns on a number of fronts with respect to this program and that’s why we’ve moved forward with a number of initiatives, one of which is making sure we tighten up the revocation and the suspension of the program for people who are abusing temporary foreign workers,” she said.

The rules would also put the onus on employers to prove they were meeting the conditions of the program – including fair wages and safe conditions – and will also see government officials conduct inspections of companies who hire temporary foreign workers.

Leitch said the government audits employers, but both employees and the provinces can help by flagging abuses.

But the Alberta Federation of Labour said it’s difficult for foreign workers to speak out due to language barriers, insufficient understanding of the rules or fear of retribution from their employer.

As for the provinces, not all of them delineate complaints based on whether an employee is temporary or not. And the Alberta government said it does share its information with the federal government, including the names of bad employers.

But it’s up to the federal government to make sure those names make it onto the blacklist the next time they apply for a temporary foreign worker.

*With files from Mike Le Couteur*

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Associate Producer

Rebecca Lindell covers politics and national affairs as part of the Global News team.

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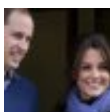
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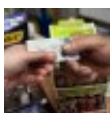
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