

**Inspector General Finds Widespread Failures
in the INS's Mailing of Immigration Documents for
Two September 11 Terrorists Six Months After the Attacks**

May 20, 2002 (Washington, D.C.) – Glenn A. Fine, Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Justice, today released a report examining why the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) mailed forms notifying a Florida flight school that two September 11 terrorists had received approval to change their immigration status from “visitors” to “students” six months after the terrorists attacks. The mailing of these forms raised questions about the INS’s handling of change of status applications for Mohamed Atta and Marwan Alshehhi and their three admissions into the United States in 2000-2001. The incident also raised serious concerns about the INS’s monitoring and tracking of foreign students in the United States.

The 188-page report found that the INS’s adjudication of Atta’s and Alshehhi’s change of status applications and its notification to the flight school were untimely and significantly flawed. First, the INS took more than 10 months to adjudicate the two men’s applications. As a result, Atta’s and Alshehhi’s applications were not adjudicated until July and August 2001, well after they had finished their flight training course at Huffman Aviation, a flight training school in Venice, Florida. Second, the INS adjudicator who approved their applications did so without adequate information, including the fact that Atta and Alshehhi had left the country two times after filing their applications which meant they had abandoned their request for a change of status. And third, even after the INS took 10 months to approve the applications, the notification forms were not sent to the Florida flight school for an additional 7 months because the INS failed to adequately supervise a contractor who processed the documents.

After the September 11 attacks, the INS had gathered Atta’s and Alshehhi’s INS files for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. “However, no one in the INS located – or even considered locating – the notification forms that were being processed by the INS contractor,” Fine said. “As a result, the forms continued to be processed and were later mailed to Huffman Aviation 6 months after September 11. In our judgment, this was a widespread failure by many individuals in the INS,” Fine said.

With regard to Atta’s and Alshehhi’s entries into the United States, the OIG concluded that the evidence does not show that the inspectors who admitted them violated INS policies and practices. The OIG found, however, that prior to September 11 the INS did not closely scrutinize aliens entering the

country to become students and did not uniformly require foreign students to present the required documentation before entering the United States.

Finally, the OIG evaluated the INS's tracking systems for foreign students – the paper-based system that exists now as well as SEVIS, the Internet-based system that the INS is developing. “The INS's current, paper-based tracking system is inefficient, inaccurate, and unreliable,” Fine said. “SEVIS has the potential to improve the INS's monitoring of foreign students, but SEVIS alone will not solve the problems of the INS's tracking of foreign students.”

For example, the report noted that the INS must review the schools that are eligible to enroll foreign students, must ensure that information in SEVIS is timely and accurate, must train INS employees and school officers on their responsibilities, and must ensure that the information in SEVIS is properly analyzed and used.

The report offers 24 recommendations to help address the problems highlighted by the Atta and Alshehhi cases and the problems found by the OIG's review of the INS's foreign student program.

**The full report is available on the OIG's website at
“<http://www.usdoj.gov/oig>” under the heading “Special Reports”**