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Homeland Security accepts fake ID

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The Department of Homeland Security allowed a man to enter its headquarters last week using a fake Matricula Consular card as identification, despite federal rules that say the Mexican-issued card is not valid ID at government buildings.

Bruce DeCell, a retired New York City police officer, used his phony card -- which lists his place of birth as "Tijuana, B.C." and his address as "123 Fraud Blvd." on an incorrectly spelled "Staton Island, N.Y." -- to enter the building Wednesday for a meeting with DHS officials.

Mr. DeCell said he has had the card for four years and has used it again and again to board airliners and enter government buildings, without being turned down once. But he said he was surprised that DHS, the agency in charge of determining secure IDs, accepted it.

"Obviously, it's not working," Mr. DeCell said.

The Mexican government has issued millions of Matricula Consular cards in the past few years, mostly to give illegal aliens a form of identification that banks and other institutions will accept.

The FBI, in testimony to Congress, has said that the cards are not secure. The General Services Administration ruled in 2003 that the Matricula Consular is not valid ID for entering a federal building.

In addition to being a forgery obtained for him from a street vendor in California, Mr. DeCell's card was modeled on an older version, which the Mexican government publicly acknowledges is not a secure document. The Mexican government says the old-style cards "are no longer valid."

Some members of Congress tried to crack down on use of the card, particularly as valid ID for opening a bank account, but the Bush administration opposed that effort.

Jarrod Agen, a spokesman for DHS, said the department shouldn't have allowed the ID to be used for entry to its headquarters.

"DHS is following up on these allegations and will take necessary actions to ensure there is not another occurrence of this type," he said.

Mr. DeCell had provided his name, birth date and Social Security number to be pre-cleared for entry to the building and had been vetted before, Mr. Agen said. The security guard accepted the ID to match Mr. DeCell's name to a name on her list of cleared visitors, he said.

The spokesman said Mr. DeCell's group went through metal detectors and other routine

security screening and had an escort at all times while in the building.

"At no time was there a threat to any person or property," Mr. Agen said.

DHS' security performance didn't surprise one member of Congress.

"You mean the Department of Homeland Insecurity," said Rep. Elton Gallegly, California Republican and one of the first to introduce a bill in Congress several years ago cracking down on acceptance of the Matricula Consular card. "The real sad story here is that it doesn't surprise me -- in fact it just vindicates all the things I've been saying here, along with so many others."

The Mexican government argues that the cards improve security by giving illegal aliens some form of identification, which assists police and businesses.

Mexico is not the only country to issue such cards, and has in fact issued a form of the Matricula Consular card for decades. But Mr. Gallegly said the Mexicans used to issue few, and only for special circumstances, while in recent years they have issued millions.

Mr. DeCell is a member of 9/11 Families for a Secure America, an organization of families with relatives who died in the September 11 terrorist attacks. He and two other members paid the visit Wednesday to DHS officials.

Mr. DeCell said he keeps the fake ID card in his wallet and often shows it just to see what places will accept it. He keeps his driver's license handy in case the forgery is challenged, he said, but it never has been.

"I'm dismayed," Mr. DeCell said.

Joan Molinaro, who accompanied him, said she was shocked that DHS, of all agencies, accepted the phony ID.

"Homeland Security is not doing their job," she said. "Homeland Security accepted a fraudulent document as a legitimate one."

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