ICE BADGES & PATCHES IDENTIFICATION GUIDE

A Comprehensive Reference for Understanding
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Insignia

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Understanding ICE Structure	3
2. HSI vs. ERO Badge Types	4
3. Patch Identification Guide	5
4. Officer Verification Steps	6
5. Federal Impersonation Laws	7
6. Know Your Rights	8
7. Reporting Impersonation	9

8. Quick Reference Card 10

9. Related Resources & Links 11

Introduction

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is a principal investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. This guide provides essential information about ICE badges and patches, helping you understand how to identify authentic federal officers, recognize the different divisions within ICE, and know your rights during enforcement encounters.

Understanding ICE identification is important for both law enforcement professionals and community members. Proper identification protects officer safety, ensures public accountability, and helps combat impersonation schemes. For more on how different agencies coordinate, see our guide on how agencies collaborate on investigations.

About ICE

ICE BY THE NUMBERS			
20,000+	**400+**	**50+**	**90+**
Employees	U.S. Offices	Countries	Int'l Offices

ICE was established on March 1, 2003, combining functions from the former Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and U.S. Customs Service. Understanding ICE structure helps contextualize how federal agency badges differ from local police badges.

1. Understanding ICE Structure

ICE comprises two completely separate law enforcement components with distinct missions. This division mirrors how sheriff vs. police departments maintain separate jurisdictional authorities.

DIVISION	HSI	ERO
Full Name	Homeland Security Investigations	Enforcement and Removal Operations
Primary Role	Criminal Investigation	Immigration Enforcement
Badge Type	Special Agent	ERO Officer
Authority	1811 Series (Criminal Investigator)	Immigration Enforcement
Key Functions	Drug trafficking Human smuggling Cybercrime Financial crimes	Arrests & detention GPS monitoring Removal proceedings Detention facilities

Key Differences

- **HSI Special Agents** conduct criminal investigations into transnational crimes with broad investigative authority. Learn more about police ranks explained.
- **ERO Officers** handle civil immigration enforcement including arrests, detention, and removal proceedings.
- Both divisions have separate chains of command. Browse law enforcement badges by department for comparison.

2. HSI vs. ERO Badge Types

ICE issues distinct badge types corresponding to specific roles. Explore our complete badge types guide to understand variety across agencies.

HSI Special Agent Badge

- Prominently displays "SPECIAL AGENT" designation
- Features the Department of Homeland Security eagle seal
- Includes unique serial number for traceability
- Gold finish similar to gold police badges

ERO Officer Badge

- Displays "ERO OFFICER" or "DEPORTATION OFFICER" designation
- Features the Department of Homeland Security eagle seal
- Includes unique serial number for traceability
- Authority focused on immigration enforcement

Badge Security Features

SECURITY FEATURE	PURPOSE
Unique Serial Number	Enables verification through agency databases
DHS Eagle Seal	Confirms Department of Homeland Security authority
Intricate Engraving	Makes counterfeiting difficult
High-Quality Materials	Professional appearance, durability
Specific Designations	Distinguishes between HSI and ERO roles

3. Patch Identification Guide

Beyond metal badges, ICE personnel utilize patches for visibility during field operations. Security professionals in California should review BSIS patch approval requirements.

PATCH TYPE	DISPLAY TEXT	PRIMARY USERS	PLACEMENT
Standard Agency	ICE	All ICE Personnel	Chest, Back
Law Enforcement	POLICE ICE	ERO Officers	Tactical Vests
Investigations	POLICE HSI	HSI Special Agents	Raid Jackets
Subdued	ICE (OD Green)	Tactical Operations	External Carriers
Reflective	POLICE ICE	Night Operations	Vest Panels

Important Notes About ICE Appearance

- ICE officers often wear **plainclothes** or tactical vests rather than standardized uniforms
- Gear may display "POLICE," "ICE," or "HSI" on tactical vests
- ICE agents do **not** wear municipal police uniforms
- See our coverage of police badge security at the 2025 World Series

4. Officer Verification Steps

Follow these steps to verify ICE officer identity during an encounter. You can perform these checks through a window or peephole without opening your door.

Step 1: Badge Verification

- Look for the DHS eagle seal on the badge
- Check for "Special Agent" (HSI) or "ERO Officer" designation
- Note the badge includes a unique serial number
- Badge should be gold-colored with professional construction

Step 2: Credentials Examination

- Request to see credential card (commission book)
- Credential must show officer's photograph
- Credential displays name, badge number, organization
- Specifically identifies DHS/ICE authority

Step 3: Visual Appearance Check

- ICE agents often wear plainclothes with tactical vests
- May display "POLICE ICE," "POLICE HSI," or "POLICE"
- Do NOT wear municipal police uniforms
- Compare to standard police officer badges

■■ Warning Signs of Impersonation

- Refuses to show badge or credentials
- Demands immediate cash payment
- No visible agency identification
- Unprofessional or threatening behavior
- Cannot provide badge number when asked
- Threatens arrest without warrant documentation

5. Federal Impersonation Laws

Federal law protects against ICE impersonation. Similar credentialing concerns affect other professions—see our guide to bail enforcement agent licensing.

STATUTE	OFFENSE	MAXIMUM PENALTY
18 U.S.C. § 701	Manufacture, sale, or possession of counterfeit federal badges	Up to 6 months imprisonment
18 U.S.C. § 912	False impersonation of federal officer or employee	Up to 3 years imprisonment
18 U.S.C. § 913	Impersonation while conducting arrest or search	Up to 3 years imprisonment

Key Legal Points

- Impersonation applies to verbal declarations AND displaying counterfeit badges
- Working with authorized manufacturers for custom badges is essential
- State laws may also apply with additional penalties
- ICE has issued public warnings about impersonation schemes

6. Know Your Rights

Understanding your rights during encounters with federal officers protects both individual liberty and public safety. These rights apply regardless of immigration status.

Your Rights During an Encounter

✓ You may ask to see badge and credentials through window or peephole
✓ You are NOT required to open your door without a judicial warrant
✓ You may remain silent and decline to answer questions
✓ You may ask if you are free to leave
✓ You may request an attorney before answering questions
✓ You may document the encounter (if safe to do so)

Warrant Requirements

• A **judicial warrant** (signed by a judge) is required to enter a home without consent
• An **ICE administrative warrant** (Form I-200) does NOT authorize home entry
• You may ask to see the warrant through a window or slipped under the door
• Verify the warrant lists your address and is signed by a judge

If Approached Outside Your Home

• Stay calm and do not run
• You may ask "Am I free to leave?"
• You do not have to consent to a search
• You may remain silent (state clearly "I am exercising my right to remain silent")
• Do not provide false documents or information

7. Reporting Impersonation

If you suspect someone is impersonating an ICE officer, report it immediately. Impersonation threatens public safety and undermines trust in legitimate law enforcement.

How to Report

AGENCY	CONTACT METHOD
FBI (Primary)	Local FBI Field Office fbi.gov/tips 1-800-CALL-FBI
ICE	Local ICE Office ice.gov 1-866-DHS-2-ICE
DHS OIG	oig.dhs.gov/hotline 1-800-323-8603
Local Police	Call 911 for emergencies Non-emergency local number

Information to Document

- Date, time, and location of encounter
- Physical description of the individual(s)
- Vehicle description and license plate (if applicable)
- What was said or demanded
- Any badge or credential numbers visible
- Names of any witnesses
- Photos or video (if safe to capture)

8. Quick Reference Card

Print and keep this quick reference guide for immediate access during an encounter.

AUTHENTIC ICE OFFICER CHECKLIST

✓ Badge displays "Special Agent" OR "ERO Officer"

✓ Badge includes DHS eagle seal

✓ Badge has unique serial number

✓ Officer presents photo credential card

✓ Credential shows name and organization

✓ Professional demeanor and appearance

■■ RED FLAGS - POSSIBLE IMPERSONATION

✗ Refuses to show badge or credentials

✗ Demands immediate cash payment

✗ No visible agency identification

✗ Cannot provide badge number

✗ Threatens immediate arrest without warrant

YOUR RIGHTS

• Ask to see badge and credentials (through window)

• Do NOT open door without judicial warrant

• Remain silent

- Request an attorney
- Report impersonation: 1-800-CALL-FBI

9. Related Resources & Links

Explore these additional resources from Owl Badges for more information on law enforcement identification, badge types, and professional standards.

Product Guides (Click to Visit)

- Federal Agency Badges - Official government badge specifications
- Custom Badges Shop - Browse all badge options
- Custom Badges Overview - Design your own badge
- Police Officer Badges - Standard officer insignia
- Sheriff Department Badges - County law enforcement
- Police Chief Badges - Command-level insignia
- Gold Police Badges - Premium gold finish options
- Army Police Badges - Military police insignia
- Badge Types Guide - Shapes and styles explained
- Badges by Department - Agency-specific reference

Educational Blog Articles (Click to Read)

- Sheriff vs. Police: Understanding the Differences
- How Agencies Collaborate on Investigations
- Bail Enforcement Agent Licensing Requirements
- Police Badge Security at the 2025 World Series
- How to Get Badges Approved by California BSIS
- Police Ranks Explained: Complete Hierarchy Guide

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