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**Year's visa quota
exhausted in 1 day**

BY MARGARET PRICE
DAILY NEWS WRITER

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Foreigners needing H-1B visas to work in America are out of luck for the next 12 months.

The government imposes an annual quota of 65,000 H-1B visas issued per fiscal year. **This year, the cap was reached on Oct. 1, the first day of the 2005 fiscal year. That means no new H-1B visas will be granted for another 12 months.** But on April 1, 2005, employers wishing to hire skilled foreigners may begin filing H-1B visa applications for the year beginning October 1, 2005.

Foreign professionals obtain H-1B visas to work in the U.S. in specialty areas, such as medicine, high tech, and teaching. These visas are issued initially for three years, but may be extended for another three years.

Businesses also fear the 66,000 quota on H-2B visas - used by foreign workers, often in non-agricultural seasonal jobs in the U.S. - could be reached by Dec. 31.

Some business and other groups are clearly alarmed, especially by the current drought of H-1B visas.

"People were very surprised to find the cap exhausted on the first day of the fiscal year," said Sandy Boyd, chair of the Compete America coalition. "We're just starting to hear from companies about a direct impact on them, including projects that won't get done."

Some organizations are now having to "think about how to restaff projects or whether to delay them," Boyd said. "There's no question that the (quota) has an economic impact."

The H-1B cap, which had reached as high as 195,000 a year from 2001 to 2003, reverted to an earlier 65,000 level in the 12 months ending this September.

