



A Network for Local Action Against Sweatshops

Subsidizing Sweatshops Factsheet for Illinois

Subsidizing Sweatshops is the first report of its kind. By revealing severe human rights violations in factories that make public employee uniforms for the federal government, states, and local governments, the report shows how governments inadvertently use tax dollars to increase the downward pressure on labor rights, wages, and working conditions.

Subsidizing Sweatshops is based on thorough person-to-person interviews with workers in twelve factories in nine countries producing for nine major uniform brands: Bob Barker Company, Cintas Corporation, Eagle Industries, Fechheimer Brothers Company, Lion Apparel, Propper International, Rocky Brands Inc., and Williamson-Dickie Manufacturing Company.

Key findings include child labor; illegally low poverty wages; forced and unpaid overtime; verbal, physical, and sexual abuse; pregnancy testing; excessively long work hours causing physical ailments; disregard for freedom of speech or association; and elaborate schemes to deceive corporate auditors.

Here are highlights of companies featured in the report that are suppliers to the state of Illinois. The full report is available at www.sweatfree.org/subsidizing.

Brand: Fechheimer

Factory investigated: Alamode in Siquatepeque, Honduras

Vendor: Ray O-Herron Company Inc., Leon Uniform Company, Uniform Den Inc.

Product: State Police Uniforms

Contract: [http://www.purchase.state.il.us/ipb/Master.nsf/ViewAttachment/F43A65836650AE96862573C60010B302/\\$file/T7080218662.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.purchase.state.il.us/ipb/Master.nsf/ViewAttachment/F43A65836650AE96862573C60010B302/$file/T7080218662.pdf?OpenElement)

Conditions found:

- Overtime is forced, unpaid, and undocumented. Regular hourly wages are below minimum wage.
- For union organizing, employees are faced with firings and police repression.
- Workers are afraid to speak with monitors, having been told by managers that they would be fired if they talked with anyone about the working conditions in the factory.
- Women are forced to take a pregnancy test each year, and are fired if found pregnant, even though Honduran law provides paid maternity leave.
- Safety gear is not available. The working environment is hot and unsanitary. Bathrooms are unclean and not supplied with toilet paper. However, when a monitor visits, safety masks appear on workers' faces, toilet paper is in the bathrooms, and the toilets have been cleaned.

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Brand: Dickies

Factory investigated: Two factories in Karachi, Pakistan.

Vendor: Henderson's Advertising, Ray O-Herron Company Inc., Uniforms Manufacturing Inc

Product: DNR Uniforms

Contract: [http://www.purchase.state.il.us/ipb/Master.nsf/ViewAttachment/73ED6F74E79507AD86257413000E205B/\\$file/T6960222072.pdf?OpenElement](http://www.purchase.state.il.us/ipb/Master.nsf/ViewAttachment/73ED6F74E79507AD86257413000E205B/$file/T6960222072.pdf?OpenElement)

Conditions found:

- Wages are the same as ten years ago (averaging the equivalent of \$80-\$109 per month) and significantly less than workers' need for basic living expenses. Pay is often received late, and sometimes not at all, and workers are cheated of overtime pay.
- Workdays average 10-13 hours per day, and occasionally workers must work around the clock. Some workers claim schedules that last 30 days straight with no break. These schedules are involuntary; if workers don't agree to the long hours they risk their job.
- Workers are hired and paid through an employment contractor. Workers' rights do not apply to contracted workers.
- Worker organizing is forbidden. If workers are found to be organizing in any way they are fired. Even casual conversation between workers can constitute termination.
- When workers have an opportunity to speak with corporate auditors, management tells them how to respond to the questions.

Recommendations

The report calls on public entities including the state of Illinois to join the Sweatfree Consortium, a collaborative effort of states, local governments, labor rights experts, and human rights advocates to facilitate sweatfree purchasing policy enforcement by pooling resources, sharing knowledge and expertise, and coordinating standards and code compliance activities. The report also urges uniform companies to join states and local governments in reforming the industry. At a minimum, companies should respond constructively to the specific factory cases in the report: not by ignoring the problems, or by running away from the problems and turning immediately to alternate suppliers. They need to recognize their responsibility for, and their influence over, the working conditions in supplier factories and by working to improve the conditions for workers.