



A Network for Local Action Against Sweatshops

Subsidizing Sweatshops Factsheet for Maryland

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 eight major uniform brands: Bob Barker Company, Cintas Corporation, Eagle Industries, Fechheimer Brothers Company, Lion Apparel, Proper 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 Maryland. The full report is available at www.sweatfree.org/subsidizing.

Brand: Bob Barker

Factory investigated: Arena Fashion Wear, Chittagong, Bangladesh

Source: On file at SweatFree Communities office

Conditions found:

- No safe drinking water; workers drink water from the toilets.
- The high hourly production target is hard to meet. If workers don't fill the target, they must work overtime.
- Employees work without an employment contract.
- When the factory receives emergency orders, working hours are even more excessive. Workers report a few shifts each month from 8 am to 3 am the next day, followed by another shift starting at 8 am.
- Workers cite physical punishment, including beatings, for refusal of shifts, absences, or mistakes.

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Brand: Cintas

Factory investigated: Alamode in Siquatepeque, Honduras

Source: On file at SweatFree Communities office

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.

Brand: Lion Apparel

Factory investigated: Alamode in Siquatepeque, Honduras

Source: On file at SweatFree Communities office

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.

Brand: Rocky Shoes

Factory investigated: Quan Tak Footwear Company:

Source: On file at SweatFree Communities office

Conditions found:

- When there are orders, workers must work Sundays for no compensation. The only time workers have a rest day is when there are no orders.
- Punch cards are manipulated so that no overtime pay is awarded and wage slips are not distributed.
- Rocky rejected a winning case brought to the local Labor Dispute Arbitration Committee by the workers, and then took the case to court.
- Rocky continues to ignore worker rights concerns in China factories, despite the public concern of the city of Los Angeles. Los Angeles decided to stop purchasing Rocky Brand due to its



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pledge to “sweatfree” purchasing.

Recommendations

The report calls on public entities 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.