



A Network for Local Action Against Sweatshops

## Subsidizing Sweatshops

### *Factsheet for Massachusetts*

*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, 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 supply to approved vendors of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The full report is available at [www.sweatfree.org/subsidizing](http://www.sweatfree.org/subsidizing).

#### **Brand: Dickies**

*Factory investigated:* Two factories in Karachi, Pakistan.

*Vendor:* Aramark Uniform, Doughboy Police and Fire Supply, Raphaels, Worcester County Police Equipment, Inc., Darter Specialties, Inc

*Contract:* CLT06 on file at the Sweatfree Office

*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

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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.

**Brand: Bob Barker/Leslee Scott**

*Factory investigated: Arena Fashion Wear, Chittagong, Bangladesh*

*Vendor: Raphaels*

*Contract: CLT06 on file at the Sweatfree 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.

**Brand: Propper**

*Factory investigated: Suprema Manufacturing in San Pedro de Macoris Free Trade Zone, Dominican Republic*

*Vendor: ANDREA'S POLICE SUPPLY, Worcester County Police Equipment, Inc., Doughboy Police and Fire Supply*

*Contract: CLT06 on file at the Sweatfree Office*

*Conditions found:*

- The company claims work shortages in order to fire unionizing employees.
- The work atmosphere is hot and dusty with poor ventilation. Employees say it is too hot to wear a face mask and report respiratory illnesses.
- Workers are fined for late arrival or early departure.
- Workers are forced to meet unreasonably high production quotas and overtime is unpaid.
- Without the production bonus, wages are the equivalent of US\$140, hardly enough to live on.
- Bathrooms are very dirty. Management rations toilet paper; when it runs out women use fabric remnants.

**Brand: Rocky Shoes**

*Factory investigated: Quan Tak Footwear Company*

*Vendor: ANDREA'S POLICE SUPPLY, Worcester County Police Equipment, Inc., Doughboy Police and Fire Supply*

*Contract: CLT06 on file at the Sweatfree Office*

*Conditions found:*



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- 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 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.