



A Network for Local Action Against Sweatshops

Subsidizing Sweatshops

Factsheet for Seattle

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 city of Seattle. The full report is available at www.sweatfree.org/subsidizing.

Brand: Fechheimer

Factory investigated: Hui Yang Charming Garments in Huizhou City, Guangdong, China

Vendor: Blumenthal Uniforms

Product: Dress Uniforms, trousers (men's & women's)

Contract: http://www.blumenthaluniforms.com/by_category.php?category=344&PHPSESSID=91edm8jonk40afhkqv7s2kc9i7

Conditions found:

- Schedules are sometimes 13 hours of work per day for 30 days straight, which is almost double the legal maximum work hours for a month. Taking a day of rest is not an option for workers, or they will lose three days of wages and bonuses by way of punishment.
- Workers claim that around 20 under-aged workers, as young as 14 years old, are at Charming Garments, violating Chinese labor law.
- Sewing machine operators are paid by piece so when orders are low, wages are very low. When

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there are big orders, workers must work long hours for no overtime pay.

- Managers prepare fake wage and hour slips to show auditors. Underage workers are hidden from auditors on inspection days by taking a forced “day off.”

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.