



A Network for Local Action Against Sweatshops

## Subsidizing Sweatshops II

### Factsheet for Maine

April 15, 2009-- *Subsidizing Sweatshops II* tracks developments in four factories covered in the *Subsidizing Sweatshops I* (July 2008) and adds four additional factory case studies. These eight factories are located in China, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Mexico, and United States and produce for nine major uniform brands – Armor Holdings / BAE, Cintas Corporation, Eagle Industries, Elbeco, Fechheimer Brothers Company, Lion Apparel, Propper International, Rocky Brands, and Williamson-Dickie Manufacturing.

*Subsidizing Sweatshops II* documents severe violations of labor law and human rights in nearly all factories investigated. In light of these findings, SweatFree Communities asks companies to improve conditions in the facilities and assess the impact of their prices, delivery schedules, and supply chain relationships on factories' ability to comply with codes of conduct and labor rights standards. In addition, SweatFree Communities urges governments to maintain contracts with companies working to remedy violations and to join the Sweatfree Purchasing Consortium.

Below are summaries of labor conditions at factories in the report that supply, or have recently supplied, the State of Maine. The full report, including quotes from workers and detailed recommendations for each case, is available at [www.sweatfree.org/subsidizing](http://www.sweatfree.org/subsidizing). Many other factories also make uniforms and related apparel for the State of Maine. This fact sheet is not a comprehensive report on Maine supplier factories.

### **Brand: Propper International**

**Factory investigated: Suprema Manufacturing** (San Pedro de Macoris, Dominican Republic)

**Vendor:** Neptune Uniforms & Equip.

**Contract:** Dept of Public Safety Contract MA-18P-070701-178 for BDU's pants & shirts, starting 10/01/04 and ending 10/31/08, shows sourcing from this factory:

<http://www.maine.gov/purchases/reports/cocdata.htm>

- **Poverty wages.** The base wage only pays one-quarter the cost of basic necessities for a family of three.

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- **Excessive production quotas.** Workers work through breaks, refrain from going to the bathroom, and come to work sick to meet production goals and earn sorely needed production bonuses.
- **Unhealthy work environment.** Workers are concerned that suffocating heat in the summer and air thick with fabric dust is detrimental to their health.
- **No voice on the job.** Workers interviewed were afraid that complaining too much or joining the union would get them fired. One worker was fired shortly after participating in our interview and believes that her firing was an illegal action of retaliation because of her support for the union.

***Brand: Rocky Brands***

***Factory investigated: Genfort Shoes*** (Zhongshan City, Guangdong Province, China)

Vendor #1: Tri State Fire & Police Equipment. Contract MA-18P-071022-301 for uniform boots for Maine State Prison. Contract end date: 4/30/08.

Vendor #2: Joseph Sleeper & Sons. Contract MA-18P-070801-231 for safety boots for Maine Readiness Sustainment Maintenance Center. The contract ended on 3/31/09; the contract was still active during the period of our investigation.

<http://www.maine.gov/purchases/reports/cocdata.htm>

- **Child labor.** Many workers testify that children as young as 14-15 years old work the same hours as adult workers and are instructed to hide when customers inspect the factory.
- **No rest days.** Sometimes there are no days off for an entire month during peak production periods. The law requires at least one rest day per week.
- **Excessive mandatory overtime.** Workers report as many as 100 overtime hours per month—far in excess of the 36 hour legal limit.
- **Inadequate compensation for weekend work.** Pay slips show workers are paid at time and a half rather than the legally mandated double hourly rate for daytime work on weekends.
- **Crowded dorms.** Workers live 12 people to a room of only 18 square meters (less than 200 square feet) with 10 cold showers for a hallway with rooms housing 264 workers.
- **Pollution.** Workers describe the factory as discharging effluent directly into the river adjacent to the factory. The water is black and foul smelling.

***Brand: Elbeco***

***Factory investigated: Elbeco’s City Shirt Company*** (Frackville, Pennsylvania)

Contract information: Disclosures from vendors supplying the state of Maine include Elbeco but appear to erroneously list Reading, Pennsylvania, the company’s headquarters, as the point of assembly. Either the products supplied under the contracts PO200600132 (winter uniform shirts for Dept of Public Safety, purchase order for \$18,000 on 8/2/05), PO200601265 (summer uniform shirts for Dept of Public Safety, purchase order for \$12,975 on 3/13/06), MA-18P-

070701-204 (uniform shirts / pants cargo for Corrections, contract end date 5/31/09) are manufactured at Elbeco's Frackville, Pennsylvania, facility or at one of its contract factories. <http://www.maine.gov/purchases/reports/cocdata.htm>

City Shirt Company is a unionized workplace and the only factory in this report with an effective functioning union, which helps establish decent wages and benefits for workers through collective bargaining with the company. The union also makes a more intangible difference in workers' lives by giving them a seat at the table with the company and affording them a sense of ownership and respect. These are our recommendations for Elbeco:

- Prioritize continued production in unionized facilities with good wages and decent working conditions.
- Work proactively to ensure good working conditions in the company's contract facilities. Assess the impact of Elbeco's purchasing practices on working conditions in contract facilities and eliminate negative practices while enhancing positive practices.