



A Network for Local Action Against Sweatshops

Subsidizing Sweatshops II

Factsheet for Seattle

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 documented in the report at factories that provide products to brands that supply the City of Seattle. The full report, including quotes from workers and detailed recommendations for each case, is available at www.sweatfree.org/subsidizing.

Brand: Fechheimer

Contract # 2255 with Blumenthal Uniforms, expiring 11/30/2012, for Public Safety police equipment (pants).

<http://www2.cityofseattle.net/purchasing/vendorcontracts/BVCDetail.asp?rptid=250&SortMode=1&ReportOption=0&cid=0000002255&sr1=2&sr2=2>

Factory investigated: Alamode (Siguatepeque, Honduras)

Despite some improvements since July 2008, these issues remain:

- **Health and safety** measures need to be improved; **verbal harassment** remains a problem; and workers still feel **pressure to work overtime** hours that should be voluntary.
- Strong evidence that Alamode has required workers to undergo **annual pregnancy tests** and failed to acknowledge this worker rights violation.

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Brand: Propper International

Contract # 2255 with Blumenthal Uniforms, expiring 11/30/2012, for Public Safety police equipment (pants).

<http://www2.cityofseattle.net/purchasing/vendorcontracts/BVCDetail.asp?rptid=250&SortMode=1&ReportOption=0&cid=0000002255&sr1=2&sr2=2>

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

- **Poverty wages.** The base wage only pays one-quarter the cost of basic necessities for a family of three.
- **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: Safariland / Armor Holdings (subsidiary of BAE)

Contract # 2255 with Blumenthal Uniforms, expiring 11/30/2012, for Public Safety police equipment (accessories).

<http://www2.cityofseattle.net/purchasing/vendorcontracts/BVCDetail.asp?rptid=250&SortMode=1&ReportOption=0&cid=0000002255&sr1=2&sr2=2>

Factory investigated: Safariland (Tijuana, Mexico)

- **Unpaid mandatory overtime.** 16 workers reported mandatory day-shift overtime of 2.5 hours daily for which they were not paid the overtime rate of pay; 3 workers reported mandatory night-shift overtime of 4.5 hours nightly for which they were not paid the overtime rate pay.
- Most workers interviewed worked with either **no formal work contracts or extended temporary work contracts.**
- **Mandatory pregnancy tests.** Women testified being forced to submit a pregnancy test in order to be hired. Those pregnant would not be hired.
- **Pressure and intimidation.** Many workers reported supervisors pressuring them to work faster, yelling at them, and sometimes sitting beside them for extended periods and harassing them if they did not attain production quotas.
- **Dangerous conditions.** Many workers reported accidents that resulted in puncturing and even losing fingers. Most workers interviewed also expressed concern regarding dangerous substances including Resistol glue.

Brand: Rocky Brands

Contract # 2255 with Blumenthal Uniforms, expiring 11/30/2012, for Public Safety police equipment (boots).

<http://www2.cityofseattle.net/purchasing/vendorcontracts/BVCDetail.asp?rptid=250&SortMode=1&ReportOption=0&cid=0000002255&sr1=2&sr2=2>

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

- **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

Contract # 2255 with Blumenthal Uniforms, expiring 11/30/2012, for Public Safety police equipment (shirts).

<http://www2.cityofseattle.net/purchasing/vendorcontracts/BVCDetail.asp?rptid=250&SortMode=1&ReportOption=0&cid=0000002255&sr1=2&sr2=2>

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

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.

Note: Currently SweatFree Communities does not have information as to whether these particular factories are supplying the City of Seattle. However, the City has a current contract with Blumenthal, which supplies products made by the brands named above. These brands source from the factories documented here, among others.