



A Network for Local Action Against Sweatshops

Subsidizing Sweatshops II

Factsheet for Vermont

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 are offered by State of Vermont vendors. The full report, including quotes from workers and detailed recommendations for each case, is available at www.sweatfree.org/subsidizing.

Contract information: Ben's Uniforms Inc. holds two active contracts with the State of Vermont, contract #11414 (5/2/2007 – 5/2/2009) and contract #12412 (11/1/2007 – 11/1/2009). Ben's Uniforms offers several brands including five brands investigated for this report: Dickies, Lion Apparel, Fechheimer, Elbeco, and Rocky Brands.

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Brand: Dickies

Factory investigated: Confecciones Mazara (Tehuacán, Mexico)

- **Unlawful discrimination against union supporters in hiring decisions**, otherwise known as ‘blacklisting’. A “List of Workers Not Recommended for Hire” used by the company to deny employment to workers contains 551 names, most of whom are members of the September 19 Garment Workers Union or have been active in protest campaigns supported by the Human and Labor Rights Commission of the Tehuacán Valley.

Brand: Dickies

Vendor: Lion Apparel. *Products:* jeans. *Contract #:* RS908406, *period:* 5/1/2006-4/30/2010.
http://procure.ohio.gov/RevisedContract/RS908406_RC.pdf

Factory investigated: Dickies de Honduras (Choloma, Honduras)

- **Fifty-eight workers fired**, supposedly to reduce cost. But they were **all union supporters**. Were they fired because they support the union?
- **Poverty wages**. The base wage pays at best one-half the cost of basic necessities for a family of four.
- **Exhausting work schedules**. The “4 x 4” schedule, from 7:00 am to 6:00 pm four days a week, amounts to 11 hours a day, and often 12 hours a day when workers fail to meet excessive production goals and must work late to catch up.

Brands: Lion Apparel and Fechheimer

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.

Brand: Rocky Brands

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

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 State of Vermont. However, the State has current contracts with vendors that offer products made by the brands named above, that source from these factories, among others. Full implementation of the State of Vermont’s existing sweatshop-free ordinance’s disclosure requirements should provide information on the factories in Vermont’s supply chain.