

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

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EEOC SETTLES RACIAL HARASSMENT SUIT AGAINST GEORGIA-PACIFIC CORPORATION

Class of African-American Workers Subjected to Racial Slurs, Jokes, Graffiti

RALEIGH, N.C. - The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) today announced a \$200,000 settlement of a racial harassment lawsuit against Georgia-Pacific Corporation, a leading global manufacturer and distributor of paper and building products, on behalf of four African-American employees. The workers were subjected to a racially hostile work environment by a white supervisor at the company's facility in Butner, N.C., and one employee was fired after complaining about the harassment.

"Racial harassment continues to be a widespread problem in today's workplace, as evidenced by the increasing number of charges filed with EEOC offices across the country," said Commission Chairwoman Ida L. Castro. "Employers in the Carolinas and throughout the United States should be on alert that the EEOC will vigorously enforce workplace civil rights laws to remedy and eradicate harassment."

In addition to monetary benefits for the charging parties and fees for their private attorneys, the settlement enjoins Georgia-Pacific from discriminating against employees due to race and requires the company to provide training on anti-discrimination laws for its employees, including management, at the Butner facility. Georgia-Pacific, based in Atlanta, employs more than 85,000 people in nearly 600 plants, mills, distribution centers and facilities nationwide.

The suit was filed by EEOC's Charlotte District Office under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina. According to the suit, a white manager in the company's Fabrication Shop subjected African-American employees to severe and repeated acts of racial harassment consisting of racial slurs, jokes, comments, and graffiti. In addition, the suit alleged that Georgia-Pacific terminated one of the African-American employees in retaliation for his complaints about the harassment.

Reuben Daniels, Jr., district director for EEOC's Charlotte office, said: "Combating race discrimination and harassment is one of EEOC's highest priorities in the Carolinas. It is imperative for employers to respond swiftly to complaints of discrimination and take corrective measures to eliminate such unlawful workplace conduct."

Charges of racial harassment filed with EEOC have more than doubled over the past decade from 2,849 charge filings in Fiscal Year 1991 to 6,616 in FY 2000, accounting for about 11% of all charges filed with the agency. Racial harassment is a form of race discrimination that includes racial jokes, slurs, offensive or derogatory comments, or other verbal or physical conduct based on an individual's race or color. Such conduct may create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment, or interfere with workers' performance, in violation of Title VII.

In addition to enforcing Title VII, which prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin, EEOC enforces the Age Discrimination in Employment Act; the Equal Pay Act; Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which prohibits employment discrimination against people with disabilities in the private sector and state and local governments; prohibitions against discrimination affecting individuals with disabilities in the federal government; and sections of the Civil Rights Act of 1991. Further information about the Commission is available on the agency's Web site at www.eeoc.gov.

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