

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

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EEOC SUES PICKLE MANUFACTURING COMPANY FOR DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WORKERS FROM INDIA

Low Wages, Mistreatment, Harsh Living Conditions Lead to Federal Suit on Behalf of Immigrants

TULSA, Okla. - The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) announced today that it has filed an employment discrimination lawsuit against the John Pickle Company, alleging that the Tulsa-based oil industry parts manufacturer discriminated against a class of at least 52 workers on the basis of their race (Asian) and national origin (East Indian) in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

According to the EEOC's suit, (Civil Action No. 02-CV-979K) in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Oklahoma, Pickle recruited the East Indian workers - including high-tech welders, fitters, electricians, engineers and cooks - to the United States with assurances that they would work under conditions similar to those of American workers. The EEOC alleges that Pickle instead subjected these workers to racial and ethnic harassment, discriminatory pay, and other discriminatory terms and conditions of employment. Under the watch of armed guards and the constant threat of deportation, the EEOC charges, the East Indian workers were restricted in their ability to leave the premises and were forced to tolerate derogatory ethnic slurs, work long hours for little pay, and sleep in a warehouse.

Robert A. Canino, Regional Attorney of the EEOC's Dallas District Office, who also serves as an EEOC representative on a Worker Exploitation Task Force with the U.S. Department of Justice, said that the harsh working conditions ran afoul of several federal laws, prompting the Department of Labor to file suit earlier this year alleging minimum wage and overtime pay violations. Canino added that many of the workers had already filed a private suit earlier this year alleging various claims, but noted that the private suit did not include Title VII claims.

"These workers were lured to America with false promises of decent treatment and fair pay, only to find themselves exploited and subjected to harsh degradation based on their race and national origin," said Canino. "Their hopes for a better life were crushed."

The EEOC filed suit after exhausting its conciliation efforts to reach a voluntary pre-litigation settlement. The agency's suit seeks lost wages, as well as compensatory and punitive damages for the harm suffered by the employees. The EEOC is also seeking injunctive relief to enjoin the company from future violations. The agency is also seeking to consolidate its suit with the ongoing private suit, *Chellen, et al. v. the John Pickle Company, Inc., et al.*

In addition to enforcing Title VII, which prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex (including sexual harassment or pregnancy) or national origin and protects employees who complain about such offenses from retaliation, the EEOC enforces the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, which protects workers age 40 and older from discrimination based on age; the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which prohibits gender-based wage discrimination; the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibits employment discrimination against people with disabilities in the federal sector; 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; 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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