

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

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AIRGUIDE CORPORATION AND PIONEER METALS, INC. TO PAY \$1 MILLION FOR SEXUAL HARASSMENT, RETALIATION

EEOC Suit Said Employees were Fired, Reprimanded, for Complaining about Graphic Slurs

MIAMI - The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) today announced a \$1,000,000 settlement of an employment discrimination lawsuit under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act against former Hialeah, Fla.-based Airguide Corporation and Pioneer Metals, Inc. At the time of the discrimination, Airguide Corporation manufactured parts and accessories for both commercial and residential heating and air conditioning units. Defendant Pioneer Metals, Inc. was the parent company for Airguide Corporation.

EEOC's suit said that three former female employees at the companies' Hialeah manufacturing plant were subjected to sexual harassment in the form of sexually explicit slurs and comments by their supervisor and, despite repeated complaints to management officials, the harassment persisted. The lawsuit also alleged that after several employees participated in the EEOC's investigation and/or filed charges of discrimination with the Commission, they were subjected to retaliation by the companies in the form of reprimands, discipline, harassment, suspensions, and terminations.

"I am thankful that the EEOC took our cases to court," said Ms. Maribel Suarez, one of the female employees who was retaliated against after her complaints of sexual harassment. "The harassment and retaliation that I and the other workers were subjected to negatively impacted all of our lives. It is great to put this matter behind us and move forward."

Under the terms of the Consent Decree settling the case (Civ. No. 02-22912), approved earlier this week by the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida, Airguide Corporation and Pioneer Metals, Inc. will:

- Pay a total of \$1,000,000 in monetary damages to be divided among seven former employees;
- Conduct annual training at its 19 facilities located throughout the state of Florida in an effort to prevent future discrimination; and,
- Undergo monitoring by the EEOC to prevent recurrences of discriminatory conduct throughout the three-year duration of the Consent Decree.

"As we approach the 40th anniversary of the landmark Civil Rights Act in July, sexual harassment and retaliation in the workplace are still far too common an occurrence," said EEOC Miami District Director Federico Costales. "Employers need to be aware that the EEOC will continue to press on with its mission to eradicate employment discrimination in the workplace by prosecuting cases where it has found egregious acts of discrimination."

EEOC's Regional Attorney, Delner Franklin-Thomas, said: "The Commission's law enforcement responsibilities would be severely hampered if individuals become too afraid to come forward with reports of discrimination fearing it can cost them their jobs. As such, the EEOC takes a very serious stand in cases alleging retaliation for engaging in protected activities such as filing EEOC charges and/or participating in EEOC's investigations. The one million dollar resolution here sends a strong message that it is unacceptable for employers to punish employees for exercising their rights under anti-discrimination laws."

The EEOC enforces Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, which prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin; the Age Discrimination in Employment Act; the Equal Pay Act; Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act which prohibits disability discrimination against employees in the private sector and state and local governments; certain prohibitions in the Rehabilitation Act against discrimination affecting individuals with disabilities in the federal sector; and certain sections of the Civil Rights Act of 1991. Further information about the EEOC is available on the agency's web site at www.eeoc.gov.

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