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Cintas denies claims about conditions

By Mike Boyer
The Cincinnati Enquirer

A national religious-based worker rights group Wednesday accused Cintas Corp., the Mason uniform supplier, of refusing to meet to discuss worker allegations of mistreatment and poor working conditions.

But Wade Gates, Cintas spokesman, said that wasn't the case. He said he spent "a significant amount of time" on the phone talking with representatives of the Chicago-based National Interfaith Committee - and that committee representatives canceled a meeting on their issues which had been scheduled in April in Chicago.

During a Fountain Square press conference, the committee - which has 60 affiliates around the country, including Cincinnati - issued a six-page report outlining a litany of complaints by workers at Cintas plants or its subcontractors in six cities. The workers complained of not being paid overtime, unsafe working conditions, racial and sexual discrimination, arbitrary discipline policies and company harassment of workers interested in unions.

Gates said all the allegations, which Cintas has denied, have been made previously against the company by UNITE, the laundry workers union that has an ongoing campaign to make Cintas recognize it as bargaining agent for hourly employees.

"There's nothing in the report but a collection of union allegations," he said.

Kim Bobo, executive director of the committee, denied UNITE initiated or sponsored the report.

Bobo said that the committee visited three Cintas subcontractors in Chicago that sew labels into uniforms. She criticized the working conditions of the three operations - F&F Sewing, Gil Sewing and Sewing Systems.

But Gates said the audits of the subcontractors by the company and its third-party auditors found they complied with

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the company's code of conduct.

In the case of F&F Sewing, a small operation on Chicago's north side, the Illinois Department of Labor also found it in compliance.

Bobo said the committee plans to take its concerns about worker conditions at Cintas plants to religious organizations such as hospitals, which use the company's uniforms.

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