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## Report says Cintas treats workers poorly

By Jon Newberry  
Post staff reporter

A national religious organization that says it's dedicated to improving conditions for low-wage workers has released a report brimming with accusations of poor working conditions at facilities operated by Cintas Corp. and its suppliers across the country.

The report is the outgrowth of six fact-finding trips and worker interviews conducted earlier this year in New York, Connecticut, Chicago, and California, the group said. The report cites low wages, lack of affordable health care benefits, unsafe working conditions, and anti-union tactics. It does not name any individual workers or specific Cintas suppliers.

Cintas dismissed the report as a repetition of false allegations previously made by UNITE, the laundry and apparel workers' union that's seeking to gain recognition as the representative of some 17,000 Cintas workers.

"This group has long-standing union ties and has been involved in countless union campaigns," said Cintas spokesman Wade Gates. "For an alleged faith-based group, storming offices unannounced doesn't seem like a good-faith effort to establish dialogue."

The Chicago-based National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice scheduled a press conference today on Fountain Square to publicize its charges. Cintas officials have declined to meet with its representatives or allow them access to Cintas plants, the organization said.

"They have consistently stonewalled us," said Kim Bobo, executive director of the interfaith committee.

Bobo said she was with the group's Chicago delegation when it visited a facility in Chicago that manufactures uniforms for Cintas, its only customer. The owner of the business told them that she pays workers \$5.15 per hour -- less than the legal minimum wage in Illinois -- and does not provide any health care benefits because none of the workers wanted them, Bobo said.

Gates said the F&F Sewing Co. in Chicago called when it discovered that it had not kept current with a recent change in Illinois' minimum wage law. It told Cintas that it had increased its wages and that it had paid all the back wages due, he said.

F&F makes custom-designed uniforms for Cintas. Gates said the company was recently inspected by the Illinois Department of Labor, at the behest of UNITE, and no violations were found.

Cintas' vendors and suppliers are subject to annual audits by an independent outside auditing firm to ensure compliance with Cintas' code of conduct, Gates said.

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