

Augusta Mental Health Institute Uniforms Being Manufactured in Haitian Sweatshop, In Violation of Maine Code of Conduct

Anti-sweatshop network alerts members and institutional uniform buyers upon release of new report about Cintas sweatshops

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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March 30, 2004

March 30, Bangor, ME – SweatFree Communities, a nationwide network of groups committed to stopping sweatshops, today alerted its members to a new report about sweatshop conditions at garment factories in Chicago, Haiti and Mexico that produce for the Cintas Corporation.

The report, released by the union UNITE and based on extensive interviews with employees from at least five different factories that make uniforms for Cintas, documents a pattern of abusive working conditions that violate local laws, international labor standards, and/or Cintas' own vendor code of conduct. Workers at Cintas subcontractor factories describe conditions including:

– **In Chicago:** Illegal wages, as little as \$3 per hour, and required off-the-clock work, including through lunch and breaks.

– **In Haiti:** Forced overtime work to meet excessively high quotas for wages so low that workers must borrow from management to feed their own families. Workers also report that despite the sweltering heat and dust-filled air inside the plant, they are left to drink from a tub of dirty water or forced to spend their already meager wages buying clean water.

– **In Mexico:** Workers are not allowed to speak to each other while working, and must wait for a ticket in order to use bathrooms that are dirty and often broken.

SweatFree Communities (SFC) distributed the report, calling on its members to encourage public agencies with Cintas contracts to tell the company to improve conditions, and other public agencies not to procure uniforms from Cintas unless the company demonstrates that they are taking steps to alleviate sweatshop conditions. SFC members work to ensure that schools and local governments do not spend tax dollars on uniforms and other apparel made in sweatshops. Based on the evidence of Cintas sweatshop conditions, UNITE submitted a formal complaint today to the State of Maine's Division of Purchases, asserting that Cintas, a state vendor, has violated Maine's Code of Conduct for Suppliers of Apparel, Footwear and Textiles, and asking the State to investigate the alleged violations.

“State workers do not want to wear uniforms made in sweatshops,” said Sylvia Perry, AFSCME union business agent for the Augusta Mental Health Institute workers in Maine who are wearing Cintas uniforms made in Haiti. “We look forward to working with the State Division of Purchases to see that Cintas workers get respect and dignity at work.”

Cintas, headquartered in Cincinnati, made over \$2.69 billion in sales and profits of \$249 million in FY2003. SweatFree Communities (www.sweatfree.org) is convening the first-ever national “sweatfree” conference May 14-16 in Albany, New York, to strengthen the demand for cities, school districts and other public institutions to adopt purchasing policies that do not subsidize sweatshop or abusive child labor.