Making Transparency Work for Garment Workers

Independent Factory Monitoring under Los Angeles’ Sweatshop-Free Procurement Policy

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Worker Rights Consortium

- Independent nonprofit based in Washington, DC that promotes labor rights in global apparel industry.
- Created in 2000 by university administrators, students and academics.
- Affiliates include 182 universities and colleges in North America and UK (including UW, WSU, Seattle U.).
- Investigates labor conditions in factories in leading apparel-producing countries with focus on production of university-licensed and publicly-purchased apparel.
Global Supply Chain Risk in Apparel Purchasing

Since 2013 alone:

- Worst factory disasters in human history (Bangladesh & Pakistan)
- Workers killed, jailed in violent military crackdown (Cambodia)
- Massive theft of wages even in poorest countries (Haiti)
Public Purchasing Implicated, Vendors’ Auditing Ineffective

- 2013 *N.Y. Times* report on factories producing for U.S. govt. agencies found child labor (Cambodia), deadly fire hazards (Bangladesh).
- Factories with worst problems had been audited by vendors’ compliance programs.
State and Local Government Sweatfree Purchasing Policies

- Adopted by 7 states (CA, IL, ME, NJ, OH, PA, VT), 45 cities (including L.A., Seattle, Olympia), 15 counties.

- L.A. Sweatfree Procurement Ordinance (2004):
  - Covers all apparel contracts worth $25K+.
  - Requires compliance with int’l human and labor rights standards, domestic labor and employment laws and “non-poverty wage.”
  - Requires vendors to make good faith efforts to ensure subcontractors comply.
  - In case of violation, City can withhold payment, terminate contract, apply 20% penalty.
WRC Independent Monitoring for L.A. Sweatfree Purchasing

- City contracts with WRC as independent monitor.

WRC role:
- Obtains supply chain disclosure from vendors.
- Analyzes supply chain, identifies local labor rights risks.
- Conducts outreach to workers and local labor rights advocates (community groups, garment worker unions).
- Prioritizes factories for in-depth assessment of labor conditions and rights compliance, remediation.
WRC Factory Assessments: Impacts for Garment Workers

- In-depth assessments of vendors’ supplier factories in Cambodia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, and Thailand.

- Violations identified and corrected include:
  - Forced pregnancy testing, firing pregnant workers, denial of maternity leaves.
  - Mass retaliatory firings of union members, death threats against union leaders, physical attacks on workers.
  - Unhealthy heat levels, restricted access to factory toilets, blocked fire exits.
  - Non-payment of minimum wages, severance.
Sweatfree Public Purchasing: Challenges to Compliance

- Lack of ‘critical mass’ / leverage for monitoring and enforcement – need for “consortium” approach;
- Restrictions on independent civil society in garment-producing countries – unions, NGOs;
- Instability, diffusion in supply chain relationships;
- Need to address impact of buying practices on factory-level compliance.
Thank you!

www.workersrights.org

gsd.lacity.org/sms/WRC/WRC_reports.htm