

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

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AK STEEL CORPORATION TO PAY \$600,000 TO SETTLE EEOC RACE HARASSMENT LAWSUIT

Fortune 500 Company Subjected African Americans to Nooses, Threats, Nazi and KKK Messages, Agency Charged

PITTSBURGH C AK Steel Corporation will pay \$600,000 to settle a racial harassment lawsuit brought by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the agency announced today. The EEOC had charged that the Fortune 500 company violated federal law at its Butler, Pa., facility by creating and condoning a racially hostile work environment for a group of African American employees, which included widespread racist and threatening displays for years.

According to the EEOC's lawsuit, the hostile work environment has included, since at least 2000, racially graphic graffiti, the displaying of nooses and swastikas in work areas open to African American employees, racial slurs and epithets, the open display of Ku Klux Klan videos in employee lounge areas and the circulation of Populist Party literature where the party candidate, David Duke, is a known KKK leader. Some of the graffiti contained direct or implied threats to African Americans, such as a message to "kill" them and a picture of bullets coming out of a gun accompanied by a threatening insult toward blacks. There was also a good deal of Nazi graffiti, including "I ♥ Adolf."

Besides complaints by black workers about these matters, the EEOC said, the problem was so pervasive that AK Steel's managers had knowledge of what was happening without such complaints. Subsequent to the filing of this lawsuit, Gerald Patterson, who had filed the initial charge, died.

Such alleged conduct violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which makes it illegal to deny a person any employment opportunity because of that person's race or color, sex, religion or national origin. A work environment free from racially hostile words and actions is included in the range of "employment opportunities."

The consent decree settling the lawsuit provides Patterson's estate and a class of seven African American employees with \$600,000 and includes a commitment that all employees who work at the Butler location will receive annual training in the company's equal employment opportunity policies.

"The racial harassment alleged in this case, including the use of derogatory ethnic terms, nooses displayed in the work environment and disciplining those who complained of race discrimination, represents some of the most severe misconduct this office has seen," said EEOC Regional Attorney Jacqueline McNair. "Through the consent decree resolving this case, EEOC will monitor AK Steel's treatment of employees to ensure a workplace environment free of harassment and race discrimination. Further, we believe the sizable monetary relief and the proposed training of employees on anti-discrimination policies may serve as a deterrent to future acts of blatant racism."

According to its web site, Middletown, Ohio-based AK Steel is a Fortune 500 company with nearly \$6 billion in sales and major plants and offices in Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky and Pennsylvania. The company makes flat-rolled carbon steel and stainless and electrical steel products.

The EEOC is responsible for enforcing the nation's laws prohibiting employment discrimination based on race, color, gender (including sexual harassment and pregnancy), religion, national origin, age, disability and retaliation. Further information about the EEOC is available on its web site at www.eeoc.gov.

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