

SF pledges to use purchasing power to produce sweatshop reform

Associated Press
September 14, 2005
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SAN FRANCISCO - San Francisco supervisors unanimously approved a new law on Tuesday that requires city contractors to guarantee in writing that the uniforms, computers and other goods they supply were not made by workers exploited in so-called "sweatshops." By signing the "sweat-free code of conduct," manufacturers and wholesalers that do business with the city would be promising that their workers are paid the local minimum wage, have the right to unionize and enjoy safe working conditions. The pledge also vouches that no child labor, foreign convict or slave labor was used to produce the merchandise that winds up in San Francisco hospitals, fire stations and City Hall offices.

The cities of Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Newark, N.J. and Albuquerque, N.M., already have anti-sweatshop laws on the books. But Valerie Orth, who campaigned for the ordinance as part of the international human rights group Global Exchange, said San Francisco's law goes the furthest because it includes an initial \$100,000 for enforcement and a stricter definition of what constitutes a sweatshop. Companies with one major violation of the conduct code would be disqualified from future contracts.

The purpose of the pledge is not to force the city to switch contractors, but to use the municipal government's \$600 million in purchasing power to effect change at existing factories, according to Orth.

"All of this is going to rest on a test case," she said. "Once we find a company that signs the code of conduct and then violates it by say hiring a subcontractor in Honduras where the union is busted, the city of San Francisco can say, 'You signed this code ... you have to let the workers organize.'"

The law, introduced by Supervisor Tom Ammiano and Mayor Gavin Newsom, is scheduled to take effect in 90 days. During its first year, it will only apply to the garment industry, such as contractors who supply uniforms, sheets and towels. An advisory committee will decide what category of contractors to target next.

As part of the registration process, contractors who sign the sweatshop-free pledge would have to disclose the names of their subcontractors, where their factories are located and what workers are paid.

Randall Harris, executive director of the garment industry trade group San Francisco Fashion Industries, said that out of the fewer than 200 companies producing apparel in San Francisco, none are under city contract. Harris said he nonetheless opposed the ordinance because he thinks

it puts the industry in a bad light.

"We need support in the city and county for the industry we have left here," he said. "We don't need the city of San Francisco perpetuating a belief that our industry is somehow dirty. We have worked very hard to clean it up."