

OVER 400 WORKERS FACE LAYOFFS AT STEELCASE'S FACILITY IN WEST MICHIGAN

Steelcase®

Steelcase Inc., an international office furniture company, announced a plan to remove around 750 staff at its various facilities nationwide over the next 18 months. About 400 of those will come from the company's location in West Michigan as Steelcase plans to move some of its work to Mexico and its Alabama plants. The company's headquarters in Ontario, Canada and Grand Prairie, Texas will also experience job cuts soon. The layoffs will primarily affect hourly workers. In 1997, Steelcase's West Michigan operations had about 11,000 employees. By the time the cuts are made over the next 18 months, its West Michigan employment will be down to less than 3,000.

Jeanine Holquist, a Steelcase spokesperson, explained that the layoffs have been triggered by the continuous decline in office furniture demands in the past three years. "The changes in the way people buy office furniture necessitate the need for further downsizing. Our business environment has permanently changed." Holquist said that the company will give its best effort to assist those affected employees. "Unlike past job cuts, employees will be offered a buyout incentive. The number of layoffs will depend on the number of employees taking advantage of that buyout offer."

Kentwood Mayor Richard Root was saddened about the layoff news because it will have a big impact on the state's economy and the local unemployment rate. "This is regional. It's sad, but it's a business decision. The cuts will have an impact well beyond the Kentwood city limits."

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