

CALIF. WAREHOUSE WORKERS ALLEGE CONTINUED WORKPLACE RETALIATION: COMPLAINT FILED WITH NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS BOARD



A report by FairWarning has brought to light new charges against a California warehouse which stands accused of unlawfully sacking its workers and reducing their working hours, allegedly in retaliation for workers participating in a September walkout. Only a few months earlier the warehouse had settled complaints of unfair labor practices. A complaint, leveled by upwards of 30 workers, have asked the National Labor Relations Board, to look into allegations that NFI's warehouse in Mira Loma, wrongly punished them and they had done so in retaliation to the protest march they had participated in. The September protest was to protest against hazardous working conditions at the workplace and similar retaliatory tactics that the warehouse had earlier indulged in. Included in the complaint was WareStaff, an employment firm that provided many of the Mira Loma warehouse workers to NFI. Change to Win, a national coalition of unions with about five million members has been attempting to coordinate and manage thousands of low-wage workers, in the Walmart supply chain. To ensure that their demands are met and their rights are not infringed. It is assumed that the current complaint is an offshoot of this organizing endeavor by the unions. FairWarning had found and reported earlier this year that the warehouses in this area had found an ingenious way to circumvent existing labor laws, by getting go-between firms like WareStaff to employ workers as temporary workers. So even though they may work for Walmart, only such intermediary firms are accountable to them. Walmart can continue to flout labor rules, shielded as they are from safety and wage law infringements and the unions can do little in this matter. Kathleen Hessert, a spokeswoman for NFI said that the company was reviewing the NLRB complaint. She said that what the Warehouse workers were alleging was simply not true and they were twisting facts and spreading misinformation. That's not how we work; she said adding that NFI values its employees. However, NFI's earlier record belies the spokeswoman statement as the company had settled earlier retaliation claims by six workers in three warehouses in Chino, Calif. The settlement required that NFI rehire most of the workers and also pay back pay. More complaints of unfair labor practices are also pending with the NLRB. One of the workers, Andrew Sims, says he earned \$8 for each hour that he worked. He alleged that his hours were sliced after he took part in the September strike. He said that he was given only 4 hours of work, which was around 30 hours less than what he worked earlier. The workers have also filed unsafe working conditions with Cal/OSHA regarding the NFI's Mira Loma warehouse. They said that the company emergency exits were not open, curtailing chances of safe exit in case of an unforeseen emergency. Moreover, there people in charge of heavy equipment like forklifts were not given appropriate training. In January Cal/OSHA had cited the company and proposed \$256,445 in penalties. NFI was charged with upwards of 60 safety infringements at four of their warehouses. A spokesperson for Walmart Dan Fogleman said that the company intends to address the workers apprehensions. And bring them to the notice of the employers: "We continue to take this matter seriously because it's important to us that workers in our supply chain are treated with dignity and respect," he said. *Photo credit: Warehouse Workers United*