

The Paris News

EEOC cites local company

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The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission - Dallas District has cited Turner Industries Group for civil rights violations and has ordered a formal dispute resolution process.

The commission's action, confirmed in a March 31 letter to Turner and to attorneys representing eight of the firm's Paris employees, comes as a result of charges filed under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

Attorney James Vagnini of New York said at a March 12, 2009, press conference that he had filed a class charge on behalf of Dontrail Mathis and Karl Mitchell and their coworkers. Named as charging parties in addition to Mathis and Mitchell are John Ellis, Ricky Fore Jr., Chris Hall, Stanrod Johnson, Nina Taylor and John Wilson III.

Turner Industries Group, in a statement released early today, denies the allegations.

"We are disappointed that the EEOC has issued this determination and strongly disagree with the EEOC's findings," the release states. "We welcome the opportunity to meet with the EEOC and are confident that meeting will demonstrate the Turner's Paris, Texas facility is free from any form of discrimination, retaliation, or any other workplace conduct that violates the law.

"Our Paris, Texas facility is not, nor has it ever contained a hostile work environment," the release states.

Michael Fetzer, director for the Dallas Equal Employment Opportunity Office, stated in the determination letter: "There is reasonable cause to believe that the respondent (Turner) discriminated against the charging parties and a class of similarly situated black employees ... by subjecting them to a hostile work environment and disparate treatment."

The determination letter also states there is "reasonable cause" to believe

Turner retaliated against some of the employees “because of their complaints about discrimination and opposition to practices believed to be unlawful and because of their participation in EEOC’s investigation.”

The letter also cited “reasonable cause” that Turner retaliated against “some other white employees because of their opposition to practices believed to be unlawful or because of their participation in EEOC’s investigation.”

But Turner said it has “extensively investigated the charges, and has determined that no worker nor class of workers was discriminated against based upon their race, or any other legally protected status.

“Furthermore, Turner management has determined that no worker nor class of workers was retaliated against for making complaints, for participating in investigations, or for any other reasons,” the release states.

During the EEOC investigation, the determination letter stated witnesses were interviewed and documents were reviewed.

“I have considered all the evidence disclosed during the investigation and find that there is reasonable cause to believe that Title VII violations occurred. Specifically, the evidence shows that on a regular basis the charging parties and a class of similarly situated black employees were subjected to unwelcome racial slurs, comments and intimidation, racial graffiti, nooses in the workplace and other symbols of discrimination,” Fetzer stated.

The EEOC director also stated some employees made complaints to the corporate office through a Hotline but the company failed to take effective remedial action. Fetzer said evidence indicates one of the employees, Fore, was terminated “after he repeatedly refused to make a statement against one of the charging parties.”

The determination letter further states that some employees were subjected to disparate treatment and because of their race “they were subjected to different terms and conditions of their employment than White employees, including but not limited to disparate job assignments, application of workplace rules and denial of promotional opportunities and other avenues of advancement.”

Turner denies all allegations.

“Turner Industries has a long-standing zero tolerance policy for any behavior in the workplace that disparages any employee,” the organization said. “We remain committed to maintaining a professional atmosphere that reinforces the company’s commitment to equality, fairness and tolerance.”

