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Hamptons laundry faces sex harass suit

January 30, 2012 by GARY DYMSKI / gary.dymski@newsday.com

A federal agency is suing a Southampton commercial laundry service, claiming the company "created a sexually hostile work environment" for its female employees and then retaliated against them when they complained -- in some cases by firing them.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission said yesterday in a news release it filed a sexual harassment lawsuit against Suffolk Laundry Service Inc. primarily because one of its male managers, Rajindra Singh, "over the course of several years . . . regularly touched women on their buttocks, hips, backs, forcibly kissed them and made comments about their appearance and body parts."

Ami Sanghvi, a trial attorney in the New York District Office, said the women showed great courage in coming forward to "speak up against a manager who had power over their livelihood."

The agency also said Singh "subjected the women to verbal sexual harassment by conditioning requests for time off or for laundry machine repairs with demands that the women sit on his lap or kiss him."

The complaint said Singh's actions began in 2008 and continued "through the present."

An attorney for the laundry -- Richard Howard of Meltzer, Lippe, Goldstein and Breitston of Mineola -- said, "We do not believe that sexual harassment took place, but we haven't seen the complaint. Until we see the complaint we can't say much more."

The complaint also alleged "that after discrimination charges were filed with the EEOC, Suffolk Laundry continued to permit the manager to remain in his position of authority and retaliated against women who complained by terminating them, reducing their work hours

and/or altering their work assignments."

Singh also asked female employees for dates, made comments about their specific body parts and made suggestive gestures, according to the complaint.

"Such alleged conduct constitutes sex discrimination in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964," according to a news release.

The agency said it filed suit in U.S. District Court in the Eastern District of New York after first attempting to reach a settlement.

The suit seeks to recover compensatory damages for the seven women named in the complaint, as well as obtain injunctive relief to prevent future harassment and retaliation.

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