

FORD

Ford employee files lawsuit claiming workplace cruelty



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An employee at the Ford Sterling Axle Plant in Sterling Heights has filed a lawsuit against Ford Motor Co. alleging the automaker looked the other way while coworkers harassed her, ridiculed her as a "fat pig," vandalized her work area and left her feeling terrorized.

Kellie Redmond, 50, a pipe fitter from St. Clair County, said in the lawsuit that she reported to management at least 28 instances over seven years of a hostile work environment where she was regularly mocked as obese, including left a note that said, "Stop playing victim" and "Your job is not that hard," according to a nine-page complaint filed March 9 in Wayne County Circuit Court by lawyer Deborah Gordon, of Bloomfield Hills.

Redmond was one of a handful of female pipe fitters in the plant, having begun in 1998 as a production worker, Gordon noted. In 2010, when the plant underwent layoffs, Redmond accepted a position as a skilled trades overtime clerk. It is a job she has held for the past 13 years.

"She did a great job and saved the company money," Gordon told the Free Press.

The alleged harassment began in 2017.

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Redmond isn't suing for a specific dollar amount. She wants to be compensated fairly, as determined by the court. She just wants to be able to work without fearing daily harassment, she told the Free Press; the lawsuit requests an injunction requiring Ford to put an end to how she is treated.

Ford spokeswoman Catherine Hargett said the company does not comment on personnel-related matters. But, she added, "Ford is committed to ensuring equal employment opportunities in all of its facilities nationwide. The company prohibits discrimination and harassment against employees and is firmly committed to its anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies and to diversity and inclusion."

'I was raised to tough it out'

"I never saw myself as, how they call me, a fat pig. That was never how I saw myself. But with that repetitive language, it really stole my self-esteem. It makes me very, um, I don't trust anybody anymore because I don't know who or where this is coming from. So it makes it a very uncomfortable situation every day. It's affecting my personal life by stealing my self-confidence," Redmond said. "My dad worked at that plant. I was raised to tough it out. Just get up and go to work every day. That's your responsibility, that's what you do for your family."

She will recognize her 25th anniversary at Ford on May 26.

The lawsuit lists as a "statement of fact" that Redmond is overweight. The document also says she has been subjected to a hostile work environment for years with no relief despite constant reports to the company's human resources department.

The lawsuit cites ongoing vandalism of her office, including the door and door frame and nearby electrical outlets, from 2017 through 2023 by an unknown Ford employee or employees, often with permanent marker and sometimes including profanity referring to a woman's anatomy. Additional incidents cited in the lawsuit include:

On Feb. 12, 2018, spelling out "Fat Pig" using push pins on the bulletin board outside her door

On Jan. 20, 2020, posting a newspaper headline on the bulletin board outside her office, "Huge Pink Pig Makes Its Return"

On April 9, 2021, doctoring a Ford flyer stating that Redmond was "stealing money, violating the (union) contract, breaking the law and in bed with the company to help (herself)." The verbiage also stated that Ford was "trying to bribe the overtime clerk."

On Oct. 21, 2021, dumping urine on the metal grating immediately above the ceiling of her office. The urine seeped through the grates into the ceiling tiles of her office.

The lawsuit notes that the plaintiff is a protected class based on weight and sex. And the harassment Redmond has endured for so long, and that has been so severe, has created a hostile work environment that has effectively become a term and/or condition of her employment with Ford.

The company failing to take action has resulted in damages including, but not limited to, emotional distress, mental anguish, anxiety, humiliation, and embarrassment, and loss of the ordinary pleasures of everyday life, the lawsuit said.

'I am pleading'

The lawsuit notes that Redmond filed reports after every alleged incident.

An email provided to the Free Press by Gordon, dated Jan. 4, 2018, and sent at 7:21 a.m. by Redmond to Ford human resources and local UAW leaders, said "continued harassment" in the subject line. She says in the email that she took pictures to document the situation.

"The person (s) has created a completely hostile work environment for me. I would think in today's day and age a camera could discreetly be hidden to view the door of my office and catch the person harassing me, so they can be stopped!" the email said. "I'm not quite sure what else this person(s) is capable of, and I do not want to

sit back and let this escalate. I also should not be brought to tears on a daily basis and made to feel horrible about myself!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I am pleading with you to remedy this situation immediately!"

'Stand down'

In response to this email, the Ford human resources liaison copied on it then proceeded to follow up and ask questions, Gordon said. That company manager held an “anti-harassment stand-down” with employees, telling them that they should follow the rules. Redmond was present and said she was extremely uncomfortable, knowing that the employees knew the stand-down was based on her complaints.

The alleged harassment continued, the lawsuit said.

A UAW representative didn't respond to a request for comment on Wednesday.

Gordon told the Free Press: "The company's responsibility is to make the harassment stop. In my experience, a meeting such as the stand-down is a simplistic non-solution for something like this."

'Truly shocking'

Discipline for discrimination is the responsibility of human resources, Gordon said. The indifference shown by Ford is "truly shocking," Gordon said.

"Whoever is doing this, they have no compunction about it. They continue to do it in spite of her complaints," she said. "The company has a legal obligation to make it stop. My client is in skilled trades. She's not a person not used to dealing with day-to-day stuff. But this has really gotten to her."

The trigger for these actions is a mystery, Gordon said.

"I don't know but I assume someone was unhappy about an overtime issue or decision," Gordon said Wednesday. "This person appears to have had a motive to

humiliate and harass Kellie because she was a female and overweight. In my opinion, a company should be very concerned about an employee who anonymously posts intimidating, hateful messages around the plant. This would never be allowed at Ford headquarters. Different standards exist for women who work in the auto plants, unfortunately. They are expected to tolerate this."

Redmond did loop UAW representatives in on the situation, but she didn't look to the UAW to fix the problem because it's the union's job to enforce the collective bargaining agreement, Gordon said.

"It's the company's obligation to enforce other laws outside the collective bargaining agreement," she said. "The collective bargaining agreement is exclusive remedy for things like layoff procedures and hourly rates."

When asked why Redmond waited so long to sue, Gordon said the timeline actually isn't unusual based on the fact that an employee just wants to do her job without being harassed.

"I've seen this before," she said. "What happens is, first you try to ignore it. Then you get to a point where you contact somebody. Then you hope they're going to resolve it. Then maybe it quiets down for a little while. Then it starts up again. The key here is, how difficult is it for a current employee to be suing their employer. It's a last resort. Our client hung in there for a long time hoping that somebody, somebody would finally address this," Gordon said.

She added: "I don't think the people from Ford realize that weight discrimination is illegal. It has been in [Michigan law for decades](#)."

Building for the F-150, Mustang, Transit

The Sterling Axle Plant has approximately 2,250 employees, including about 2,050 hourly UAW members, according to the Ford website. The plant builds rear axles for the F-150, F-250, Expedition, Explorer, Aviator, Mustang, Lincoln Navigator

and Transit van. The plant builds front axles for the F-150, Explorer, Aviator, Expedition and Navigator, Ford spokeswoman Kelli Felker confirmed.

Redmond told the Free Press, "I want to stop worrying about coming in every day and wondering who's going to harass me. I walk in every day, looking around me, (thinking), 'What's going to happen next?' "

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