

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

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LES SCHWAB TIRE CENTERS EXCLUDE WOMEN FROM MANAGEMENT, EEOC CHARGES IN SEX SUIT

Federal Agency Says Company Denied Women Promotion Opportunities, Told Female Employee 'Gals Should Work in Admin'

SEATTLE – Les Schwab Tire Centers, one of the largest tire and automotive businesses in the West, violated federal law by failing to hire, train, and promote women into management jobs because of their sex, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) charged in a lawsuit it filed today in U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington.

Charging Parties Megan Morris and Jennifer Strange worked in various Les Schwab stores in the Puget Sound area in Washington, including Tacoma, Bellevue, SeaTac, and Puyallup. Although they requested to work in the tire bays, they were repeatedly denied these jobs and the opportunity for promotion due to their gender, according to the EEOC. The women brought charges of discrimination to the EEOC that form the basis of today's lawsuit.

The EEOC also alleges that Les Schwab failed to hire female applicants into sales and service department jobs. These positions -- which involve mounting, dismounting, repairing and rotating tires -- are held mainly by males and are a prerequisite for entry into more lucrative management jobs. The agency found that Les Schwab excluded women from those roles for more than 50 years and only recently promoted one woman to the position of assistant manager.

"In 1996, I started at the bottom and worked up to sales and management for an independently owned Les Schwab Tire Center. But when Les Schwab corporate took over this store, they demoted me to bookkeeper," said Strange. "When I asked about my prior position, I was told 'No gal in the company would ever make that kind of money. Gals should work in admin.' I stayed for almost two years trying to move back into sales and management, but the company refused to consider me for that kind of job.

EEOC San Francisco District Director Joan Ehrlich noted, "Company founder Les Schwab's own published book exposes a corporate culture where men get the better jobs. Mr. Schwab's book describes in great detail how men get ahead in the company, and it reinforces a decades-old idea that men do certain jobs and women do others. Mr. Schwab published the book some time ago, but a copy is still available for sale in every Les Schwab store. Our lawsuit should go a long way toward bringing women into a workplace that historically has shut them out."

EEOC Regional Attorney William R. Tamayo said, "It is shocking to see a sex-segregated work force where qualified and capable female applicants and employees who want to move up the ladder of success are held back due to their gender. Our suit seeks monetary relief for a potentially large class of women, and we are also seeking corrective measures to remove the barriers of discrimination."

He noted that the EEOC filed this suit only after first attempting to reach a voluntary settlement through conciliation, and seeks monetary damages, training on anti-discrimination laws, posting of notices at the work site and other injunctive relief.

According to the company's website, www.lesschwab.com, there are over 400 Les Schwab Tire Centers in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, California, Utah and Nevada. The company is based in Prineville, Ore.

The EEOC enforces the nation's laws in the private and federal sectors prohibiting employment discrimination based on race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age and disability. The Seattle Field Office's jurisdiction includes Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. Further information about the EEOC is available on its web site at www.eeoc.gov.

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