

Big brand clothing and accessory retailers encouraged to strive for best practice workplaces

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Popular brand clothing and accessory retailers are working with the Fair Work Ombudsman to achieve best practice in the workplace after a number of chains were found to be contravening federal workplace laws.

The Fair Work Ombudsman received complaints from young workers last year after a major news website published an article about employees being forced to pay for and wear company clothing on the shop floor.

Under the General Retail Industry Award 2010, an employer who requires an employee to wear special clothing must reimburse the cost of the clothing.

Additionally, the Award provides that where an employee is required to launder a special uniform, dress or other clothing, full-time employees will get an allowance of \$6.25 per week and part-time or casual employees \$1.25 per shift.

The Fair Work Ombudsman selected eight popular-name brands for site visits in Melbourne, Brisbane, Hobart and Wagga (in regional NSW) to investigate claims that young workers were not being reimbursed for clothing they were required to buy and wear on the shop floor.

Fair Work inspectors assessed compliance at a total of 35 stores, interviewing staff in many instances, and then meeting with the head office of each retail brand to discuss how company policies were translated to custom and practice in-store.

In Victoria, inspectors visited sites at Doncaster, Chadstone, Highpoint and Melbourne Central shopping centres, as well as some in the CBD. In Queensland, they went to the Chermside shopping centre, in Tasmania they were in the Hobart CBD and at Wagga in the CBD.

A number of retail outlets were asked to reimburse employees a total of \$12,400 after it was found the staff had covered the cost of clothing and/or accessories from their own pocket without being reimbursed.

Fair Work inspectors worked collaboratively with employers to help them put policies in place which removed any ambiguity in communications with staff regarding the purchase of clothing and/or jewellery to wear whilst at work.

During the consultations, inspectors educated retailers about the range of free tools and resources at the Fair Work Ombudsman's website - www.fairwork.gov.au/retail - that have been designed to help them meet their obligations.

The dedicated industry page has information about uniforms and clothing and outlines the obligations of employers who require staff to wear company clothing or in-season stock on their shifts.

There is also information about wages, leave, rosters and breaks, as well as links to pay tools such as Award Finder and PayCheck Plus, which can be used to calculate correct wages for staff.

Facebook and Twitter are also used to communicate with employees and employers in the retail sector about their rights and obligations.

Fair Work Ombudsman Natalie James says the preference is always to work with businesses to help them put effective policies and procedures in place to achieve compliance.

"A big part of the role of the Fair Work Ombudsman is to work with businesses to ensure they have the knowledge they need to meet their obligations and where they wish, to operate at best practice," Ms James said.

"We are serious about our job of building knowledgeable and fairer workplaces and don't insist there is only one way to achieve compliance - education is equally as important as deterrents."

Further visits to retail stores across the country have started to assess compliance across the industry and ensure company policy reflects the culture on shop floors.

Each year, the Fair Work Ombudsman runs national, state and regional pro-active compliance and education campaigns focused on various industry sectors.

The Fair Work Ombudsman has developed an online learning centre with self-paced interactive courses that provide employers and employees with skills and strategies they can utilise at work.

A Difficult conversations in the workplace course has practical tips to help employers develop the skills and confidence to have a difficult conversation in the workplace, minimise disputes and achieve productive results.

A Hiring new employees course includes an interactive tool to assist employers build a profile of the employee they want to hire and a video activity to help them practice their interview skills.

Ms James says the Fair Work Ombudsman has a particular focus on assisting small businesses to understand and meet their obligations to employees.

“Small businesses often don’t have the benefit of in-house human resources and payroll staff, so we place a high priority on assisting them and developing tools and resources to make it easier for them to comply with workplace law,” she said.

The Fair Work Ombudsman has established a dedicated webpage for small business employers at www.fairwork.gov.au/smallbusiness (www.fairwork.gov.au/find-help-for/small-business/default) .

The webpage includes a Fair Work handbook for employers and a range of resources on topics such as employing staff, resolving workplace disputes and managing employees.

Employers and employees seeking further information and advice can visit the website or call the Fair Work Infoline on 13 13 94. A free interpreter service is also available on 13 14 50.

Small business employers calling the Fair Work Infoline can opt to be put through to the Small Business Helpline to receive priority service.

The Fair Work Ombudsman’s new website - which will be launched this month - allows people to search for the answers they need, save them to their own account and then access them at any time, including on their mobile.

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Fair Work Online: www.fairwork.gov.au

Fair Work Infoline: 13 13 94

Need language help?

Contact the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 13 14 50

Hearing & speech assistance

Call through the National Relay Service (NRS):

For TTY: 13 36 77. Ask for the Fair Work Infoline 13 13 94

Speak & Listen: 1300 555 727. Ask for the Fair Work Infoline 13 13 94

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