

No Sweat campaign – Question and Answer

Based on Q & A developed for presentation to Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board in June 2002 by World Youth Day No Sweat Committee, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.
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? *How many of our school and athletic uniforms are currently made in sweatshops?*

① No one knows for sure because suppliers are not required to report factory location, how much workers are paid and whether their producer has violated the law. Sweatshop conditions are widespread in garment producing countries around the world. Even in Canada, sweatshops are surfacing.

? *Why have a “No Sweat” Purchasing Policy?*

① The purpose of a “No Sweat” Purchasing policy is to ensure that Catholic **school uniforms and athletic uniforms** worn in Hamilton schools are not manufactured in sweatshops or by child labour. Ensuring that apparel manufactured for the School Board is made under humane working conditions in compliance with accepted international standards and local laws promotes greater respect for workers’ rights and improves working conditions and labour practices in the apparel industry worldwide.

? *What will the Purchasing Policy cover?*

① The purchasing policy will apply to all apparel (school and athletic uniforms) contracts entered into by the School Board and by its schools.

? *What will the purchasing policy require of suppliers?*

- ① The policy will require suppliers of school uniforms and athletic uniforms to
- 1) Disclose manufacturing locations
 - 2) Abide by local labour laws and international labour standards of the UN’s International Labour Organization
 - 3) Agree to independent monitoring

? *Why are we asking for disclosure?*

① Secrecy is one of the biggest problems in the apparel industry. People concerned about sweatshop labour abuses are frustrated by the inability to confirm where clothes are made. If we only know the country, but not the exact factory then it is impossible for concerned consumers to be sure that their clothing is not made in a sweatshop and thus, impossible to make companies take responsibility for the conditions under which their goods are made. Once the location of a factory is known, it is easier to make links with workers and support their struggles for better wages and working conditions.

? *Has anyone done this before?*

① Yes. The following educational and religious organizations have successfully developed and implemented a “No Sweat” purchasing policy thereby requiring suppliers to disclose factory locations and to abide by international labour standards.

- The **Archdiocese of Newark**, October 1997 www.rcan.org/humanconcerns/sweatshop.htm
- Several **School Boards** in New York state
- The **University of Toronto**, May 2000 www.utoronto.ca/govnci/pap/policies.trademrk.html
- more than **200 US Universities**
- University of **Western Ontario**, **McMaster** University, University of **Guelph**, **Dalhousie** University and the University of **Alberta**
- The University of **Waterloo**, **Queens** University, **Carleton** University and **Memorial** University are in the process of developing such policies

? *Will we lose our current suppliers and have to find all new suppliers?*

① No. Each supplier will be informed of this new purchasing policy and encouraged to agree to these new condition As a school board, our contracts mean significant dollars to the companies. The intent is not to change current suppliers, but to use our buying power to help improve working conditions.

When the University of Toronto presented new conditions to their suppliers after passing a “No Sweat” purchasing policy, two-thirds of their suppliers agreed to these new conditions immediately. Identifying unfair labour practices is a primary concern of a No Sweat policy, but it is not the only concern. This policy simultaneously rewards and affirms those businesses that respect labour standards.

? *How will the No Sweat policy be enforced?*

① There is no expectation for a school board to take on an extensive monitoring role. The first step is to ask all suppliers to provide detailed information regarding factory locations, as well as annual reports outlining how the company is living up to the standards set out in the No Sweat policy.

Once this information is compiled, non-governmental organizations and local labour groups will notify the Board of any violations in factories that produce clothing for the Board. In these situations, the school board can demand the supplier take corrective action in assuring that labour rights are respected.

? *Won't paying a fair wage increase the price of uniforms?*

① Increasing wages does not necessarily mean an increase in cost to consumers. Almost 75% of the ticket price of garments produced in sweatshops is allocated to the manufacturer and retailer.

Research has consistently proven that an unexploited worker is a more productive worker. People are most efficient when they aren't tired, hungry, or scared. Paying workers a living wage can only increase their productivity. Paying fair wages has the added bonus of allowing workers to become consumers, contributing to the health of the economy in that way too.

When New York City considered adopting a municipal No Sweat policy, UNITE investigators compared the prices of police shirts and trousers available at uniform vendors around the city. They found that the cost of goods produced in union shops were relatively the same as goods produced by companies known to use sweatshops. This is possible because the mark-ups charged by the manufacturer and the retail vendor are much larger than the labour costs for each shirt.

? *What benefits are there to getting suppliers to sign on to fair labour practices and monitoring if we aren't able to do the monitoring ourselves?*

① When abuses of labour rights are exposed, the purchasing policy provides a strong position from which to act. Recently purchasing policies have made a **dramatic difference** in the lives of workers in Honduras and Mexico.

A. Canadian owned Gildan operations in Honduras

In January 2002, CBC television's "*Disclosure*" exposed extensive labour rights abuses in a Honduran factory owned by Montreal-based Gildan Activewear. Gildan is a supplier for the University of Toronto and these abuses clearly violated their "No Sweat" code of conduct. Due to pressure from the University of Toronto and other customers, Gildan has since begun moving on the issue. (www.maquilasolidarity.org/campaigns/gildan/index.htm)

B. Kukdong factory in Mexico

In 2001, labour rights abuses (US \$32 for a 50-hour week) in Nike's Kukdong/Mex Mode supply factory in Mexico were exposed. This factory produces sweatshirts for several US universities with No Sweat purchasing policies in place. As large institutional buyers, these universities were able to pressure for the reinstatement of hundreds of workers who had been fired. The workers have since been able to form an independent union and sign a collective agreement which will increase take home pay of garment workers by 40%.

(www.maquilasolidarity.org/campaigns/nike/kukdong.htm)

? *I would really like to see our School Board adopt a "No Sweat" purchasing policy. What is next?*

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1. Review the proposed School Board Resolution
 2. Adopt the "No Sweat" Resolution at the next meeting.
 3. Establish a committee made up of "No Sweat" committee members, board members and appropriate board staff mandated to develop purchasing policy and necessary procedures before _____.
 4. Board Purchasing Agent will collect disclosure information from all suppliers.