

## Case #7

In October of 2002, after the overdose of one of its workers, management at a Weyerhaeuser, a multinational corporation in the pulp and paper industry located in Valliant, Oklahoma, became concerned that employees were not following drug and safety regulations in its parking lot. Management decided to have the parking lot searched with gun and drug sniffing dogs. While the dogs found no drugs, they did find firearms in twelve vehicles, including shotguns and automatic weapons. The owners of these vehicles, including a 23-year veteran shift manager, were fired in the next two days.

Weyerhaeuser and many other businesses have had long standing bans on firearms brought into the plant in order to protect workers and prevent workplace violence. In 2002, Weyerhaeuser extended this ban to the parking lot. Many workers claim they were not told of the extension of the ban, though management claims they informed workers. Some of the fired workers have filed suits claiming they were not informed. The initial suit was thrown out, but the decision is being appealed.

Since this and other incidents, many states -- beginning with Oklahoma -- have enacted laws protecting workers who want to keep firearms in their cars. The latest state to consider such a law is Florida, home to Walt Disney World, which does not allow any of its 50,000+ employees to bring guns onto company property.

A number of corporations have joined federal lawsuits against these new state laws. These companies include ConocoPhillips (petroleum), Halliburton (energy), and the Nordam Group (aircraft manufacture). They state that they cannot provide a safe and secure workplace without the ban on guns in the parking lot, and they see state laws allowing guns as infringing on the right of private property owners to decide what is and is not allowed on their property. Even aside from their property rights, companies claim that the laws would disregard public safety. The Bureau of Labor Statistics Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries states that in 2004, there were 551 workplace homicides out of 5703 workplace fatalities. A study at the University of North Carolina claims that such killings are five times more likely to occur at workplaces that allow guns compared to those who do not.

The National Rifle Association (NRA) has been the primary champion of laws that allow workers to have guns in cars in company parking lots. The NRA claims that prohibiting lawful gun owners to keep guns in their car dramatically diminishes their right to own firearms and defend themselves. All 50 states allow the transportation of firearms for lawful purposes. The laws also restrict workers who may want to hunt or target shoot after work from engaging in these lawful activities. They also claim that one's car should enjoy the same protections that one's home enjoys with regards to being able to keep lawful weapons and immunity to unlawful searches.

The NRA claims that the state laws already have commonsense provisions in them that prevent abuse. For instance, anyone wanting to transport a firearm and park their car in a company lot must keep the automobile locked, and at no time is it permissible to take the firearm out of the car on company property. Against the property rights claims of business owners, the

NRA claims that business owners are already under extensive federal, state, and local regulations about what they can do with their property and that striking down these state laws would allow companies to "micro-manage" the contents of an employee's automobile. The NRA also cites statistics that 84% of workplace murders are committed by strangers, and anyone determined to commit a crime will not be discouraged from bringing the gun onto company property by a company regulation prohibiting guns in parking lots.