

U.S. sues Tesla over pervasive racial abuse against Black workers

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San Francisco, September 30 (RHC)-- A government anti-discrimination agency in the United States is taking legal action against Elon Musk's Tesla, accusing the company of allowing the "pervasive racial harassment" of Black workers at its flagship California car factory, and taking retaliatory action against those who complained.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, a federal body, said Black workers had routinely endured stereotyping, racial insults and hostility since at least 2015

The court action, which follows a breakdown in mediation, adds federal charges to discrimination claims already filed by the state of California, lawsuits by individual Tesla employees, and a class action suit involving about 240 workers.

The electric car company “subjected Black employees at its manufacturing facilities in Fremont, California ... to severe or pervasive racial harassment and created and maintained a hostile work environment because of their race,” the lawsuit said.

“The racial misconduct was frequent, ongoing, inappropriate, unwelcome and occurred across all shifts, departments and positions,” the commission said.

The suit said the factory walls had graffiti that included swastikas, nooses and threats, with some of it allegedly on vehicles rolling off the production line.

The commission said Black workers routinely endured racist slurs including variations of the “N-word,” along with “monkey” and “boy.” “Slurs were used casually and openly in high-traffic areas and at worker hubs,” according to the commission.

Tesla announced last year that the EEOC had formally raised concerns about the situation at the factory. In the other cases, the company has said it does not tolerate discrimination and takes workers’ complaints seriously.

There was no immediate response from Tesla or Musk on the EEOC action.

According to the legal documents, Tesla supervisors and managers witnessed racial abuses but did not intervene, and Tesla failed to take steps to address the misconduct. Black Tesla workers who complained of racist treatment found themselves switched to undesirable duties or shifts, written up unjustly or even discharged, the lawsuit said.

“After I voiced my unhappiness, I started getting written up for every little thing that was acceptable before – like listening to music while working,” court documents quoted a Black Tesla worker as saying.

The lawsuit seeks unspecified damages along with compensation for wronged Black workers and an order that Tesla curb racism at the factory.

California sued Tesla last year through the Department of Fair Employment and Housing, which enforces the state’s civil rights laws and is similar to the EEOC, saying it had received hundreds of complaints from workers.

Tesla at that time released a statement saying it opposed “all forms of discrimination and harassment” and that it was committed to providing “a workplace that is safe, respectful, fair and inclusive”.

Separately, a number of female Tesla workers filed lawsuits in 2021 alleging sexual harassment at the Fremont plant.

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