

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - 9/15/2021 - Contact: Jack Mahoney, 908-300-4271,
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“A Kick in the Teeth:” Amid Pandemic, nearly 800 Healthcare Laundry Workers on the Front-Lines in the Battle Against Covid Face Layoffs

This week, hundreds of low-wage essential workers who wash linens for California and Arizona hospitals received WARN Act layoff notices after their employer, Angelica Corporation, announced the sale of their seven California plants and one Arizona plant to Emerald Textiles. These laundry workers, mostly women and immigrants, are now at risk of losing their jobs and union benefits after 18 months working on the frontlines handling soiled linens from hospitals overwhelmed by COVID-19.

“We are essential workers, but we feel invisible,” said Fortunato Montecinos, who, for 26 years, has sorted hospitals’ soiled pillowcases, bedsheets, and blankets at Angelica’s plant in Colton, CA. “I handle linens full of blood and worse, and I work hard to make sure they are safe and clean for the hospitals.”

Emerald currently faces a \$16,875 OSHA fine for “serious” violations following complaints about COVID-19 safety at its San Diego facility.(1) Emerald’s Livingston, CA laundry had a COVID-19 outbreak last year with 9 cases of infection, according to the Merced Sun-Star.(2)

“This is a real kick in the teeth to essential workers and immigrant workers on the front lines of the pandemic,” said Maria Rivera, Regional Manager of the employees’ union, Workers United WSRJB, an affiliate of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). “Emerald’s refusal to guarantee our members won’t lose their jobs and benefits by Thanksgiving is an insult to these hard working healthcare workers.”

Workers at Angelica and Emerald wash linens for many major hospitals leading the fight against COVID-19, including dozens of Kaiser Permanente hospitals. At Angelica, the employees' union contract guarantees them proper personal protective equipment, paid sick time, health care and protection from retaliation if they raise safety concerns. These protections and Angelica’s experienced healthcare laundry workers are critical to keeping patients, medical professionals, and their families and communities safe as the fight against COVID-19 continues.

**** BACKGROUND ****

For years, healthcare laundry workers had won union contracts at most of their industry’s major employers, including Angelica Corporation and Crothall Healthcare. Since Emerald entered the industry, they have undercut their competition by not providing the wages, benefits and protections that keep union laundry jobs safe and secure, lowering overall labor standards for the industry. After purchasing a laundry in Commerce, CA, Emerald fired dozens of laundry workers because of their union affiliation, according to a National Labor Relations Board judge

ruling in June.(3) The purchase of Angelica is a dramatic escalation, which follows an announcement from Emerald's investors of an additional \$200 million of capital.(4)

The Western States Regional Joint Board of Workers United, an affiliate of the Service Employees International Union, is a growing, progressive union of 10,000 workers at warehouses, commercial laundries, and other industrial jobs in California, Arizona, Nevada, and New Mexico. Website: WSRJB.org

Notes:

(1.) See OSHA [Violation Detail](#) on the case re: fine issued 4/16/2021 and "Serious" violation type. See also OSHA [Inspection Detail](#) on the same case. See OSHA [Closed Safety and Health Complaint Data](#), accessed via "Monthly OSHA Covid-19 Complaint Data" on the agency's [FOIA page](#), for complaints identified with Report ID 950632 and/or Inspection Numbers 1476682 and 1492128.

(2.) See [Merced Sun-Star article](#) 7/16/2020.

(3.) See NLRB [Administrative Law Judge's Decision](#).

(4.) See PACP's [Press Release](#) on Newswire.