

Don't be fooled by union group, CVS tells workers

By ERIK ORTIZ Staff Writer, 609-272-7253 | Posted: Monday, October 5, 2009 |

CVS Caremark Corp. is challenging an attempt by a union coalition to reach out to retail pharmacy workers in southern New Jersey.

The Put Pharmacy First campaign has been courting retail pharmacists nationwide who object to "the influence of 'fast food pharmacy' practices that put profits ahead of patients," according to its Web site. Behind the campaign are unions belonging to the Change to Win Federation, whose membership includes the United Food and Commercial Workers and the Service Employees International Union.

The campaign encourages pharmacists to band together to influence public policy, raise consumer awareness and change corporate policy, among other goals.

A representative from the Change to Win offices in Washington, D.C., did not return calls seeking comment Monday or last week.

But Woonsocket, R.I.-based CVS, in a letter to employees, said it is aware of the campaign - both locally and nationwide - and of the solicitations made to workers at their homes "by individuals who claim to want to discuss improving working conditions and experiences at our stores."

CVS, one of the country's two largest drugstore chains, operates about two dozen stores in Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland and southern Ocean counties.

Troy Dobson, region manager for CVS, said in the letter to employees that the company did not give out their information. He also said that those representing the campaign have failed to disclose that they are part of a nationwide "union project."

"I am troubled by this deception and find it unfortunate that some of you, and your families, have been subjected to the aggressive tactics that have been reported," Dobson wrote.

He added that workers have been asked to sign a card supporting the "Put Pharmacy First" project.

"I don't want you to unknowingly give away your rights by signing a union authorization card," Dobson continued.

Whether the campaign is specifically trying to organize workers is not made clear on its Web site. The UFCW and SEIU already represent workers at other drugstores, such as Rite Aid and ones operated by Pathmark.

CVS, too, reportedly has about 12,000 of its 215,000 employees unionized. The UFCW represents about 8,000 of them nationwide.

This is not the first time Change to Win and CVS have been at odds. The union federation has alleged CVS stores overcharge consumers and stock expired products. The federation says it will meet with the Federal Trade Commission next week over CVS' prescription drug prices.

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