

Smithfield Workers File Lawsuit to Request Protection against Coronavirus

A lawsuit has recently been filed against a Smithfield Foods pork plant in Milan, Missouri. The pork-processing plant is accused of not adequately protecting workers during the coronavirus pandemic. Workers have reported not taking time to cover their mouths after coughing or covering their mouths after sneezing for fear of missing meat as it goes by, thus resulting in the risk of disciplinary action. The complaint was filed by an anonymous worker. Along with the health of the workers, the health of the public has also been brought into question.

Several dozen workers signed a letter that was delivered to plant management during the week of March 30 complaining of cramped conditions and a lack of protective equipment and accommodations for sick leave. It cited the company's policy of assigning workers a disciplinary point – a tally that can lead to dismissal – if they took a day off.

Missouri Pork Plant Workers Say They Can't Cover Mouths to Cough

Many meatpacking facilities around the country have shut down or are working at a lower capacity. Ten workers have died from the coronavirus while around 6,500 employees either contracted the virus, are showing symptoms and/or have missed work due to self-quarantine. The CDC has recommended that Smithfield facilities establish stricter social distancing regulations. Through the lawsuit, workers are requesting changes to Smithfield's practices rather than compensation.

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Smithfield workers are not unionized. Before the Coronavirus outbreak workers reported not having enough time for bathroom breaks. Workers frequently suffered from urinary tract infections and other stress injuries.

Sources:

- *Missouri Pork Plant Workers Say They Can't Cover Mouths to Cough* -Organic Consumers Association
- *Missouri Pork Plant Workers Say They Can't Cover Mouths to Cough* -The New York Times