

Congress members denounce Nike in letter to Knight

Democratic lawmakers want to meet with Phil Knight to discuss Nike's labor practices

By Scott Sonner
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Dozens of Congress members are taking Nike Inc. to task for "ruthless exploitation" of Third World workers, contrasting billionaire Nike chairman Phil Knight's personal wealth with the pittance he pays Asian shoemakers.

"We are deeply disappointed and embarrassed that a company like Nike, headquartered in the United States, could be so directly involved in the ruthless exploitation of hundreds of thousands of desperate Third World workers, most of whom are women," more than 50 Democratic lawmakers said in a letter to Knight dated Sunday.

Girls as young as 13 are sewing and doing other handwork in Chinese factories that produce Nike

shoes for the U.S. market, they said.

Reps. Bernard Sanders, I-Vt., and Marcy Kaptur, D-Ohio, led the group, which seeks a meeting with Knight to discuss the company's labor practices and the reasons Nike won't build manufacturing plants in the United States.

Forbes magazine has listed Nike's primary owner among the wealthiest people in the world, placing his worth at more than \$5 billion, the House members noted.

"Sadly, while your personal wealth continues to grow, you maintain a labor strategy which pays workers in Asia pennies an hour," they said.

"You spend hundreds of millions of dollars a year in advertisements treating our young people as a market and urging them to buy your expensive products — which often cost more than \$100 a pair."

Nike's public-affairs office in Beaverton, Ore., said any comment should come from company spokesman Vada Manager. Manager was traveling and not immediately available for comment.

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Minority Whip David Bonior, D-Mich., signed the letter along with top Democrats on three committees, Reps. Charles Rangel of New York, Ways and Means; Ron Dellums of California, National Security; and William Clay of Missouri, Education and the Workforce.

No House members from Oregon or Washington signed the letter, though Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., has in the past been critical of Nike's practices.

In the letter, lawmakers told Knight that Nike could play an important role in rebuilding the manufacturing base in the United States.

But "Nike has led the way in abandoning the manufacturing workers of the United States and their families as it produces its products in low-wage Third World countries," they wrote.

"As we see it, you want American workers and their children to purchase your shoes, but you don't believe they should earn a living wage by manufacturing them," the lawmakers said.

"As members of Congress, we would very much appreciate the opportunity to discuss these issues with you."

Nike has come in for a barrage of criticism in recent weeks from human-rights groups that say the company tolerates unsafe working conditions at its plants in Third World countries.

An audit by the Ernst & Young accounting firm, leaked to reporters Friday, added new ammunition for Nike's critics.

The audit found that the Tae Kwang Vina factory, operated by a Nike subcontractor in Vietnam's Dong Nai province, lacks adequate safety equipment and training, encourages excess overtime, and exposes workers to hazardous chemicals, noise, heat and dust.

The report said some workers at the 2-year-old plant had worked 700 hours of overtime in a year — well above the Vietnamese national limit of 200 hours per year.

On Friday, company officials called a news conference after the audit was given to reporters by the Transnational Resource and Action Center, a San Francisco group that monitors conditions at U.S. plants overseas.

Nike officials said the audit is a year old. They said the company already has taken steps to improve working conditions at the factory, including strict adherence to the overtime limit.

Cholesterol-lowering drugs may affect mental capacities

A recent study shows evidence that these drugs impair mental performance in some people

By Daniel Q. Haney
The Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Lowering your cholesterol to prevent a heart attack might also dull your edge mentally, a study suggests.

The study raised the possibility that cholesterol-lowering drugs slightly reduce dexterity and attention.

Cholesterol-lowering drugs have become mainstays over the past five years after several studies showed they significantly reduce the risk of dying from heart attacks. An estimated 4 million Americans now take the most popular of these medicines, a class of drugs known as statins.

While the drugs save lives, some doctors

have wondered whether these have subtle effects on people's mental and physical performance. Some studies have found that those who lower their cholesterol seem more likely to die in tragedies such as car accidents and suicides, while other research has found no such link.

Researchers say their new study, presented Monday at a meeting of the American Heart Association, is the first to give psychological tests to people taking cholesterol-lowering drugs in an attempt to sort this out.

They emphasized that while their discovery of small decreases in ability are worthy of further study, people should not stop taking their drugs.

Even if the medicines truly do impair performance — and this is not yet proven beyond doubt — their benefits on the heart are still likely to outweigh any possible risks.

"We don't know if this affects people in the way they conduct their lives," said Dr. Matthew F. Muldoon of the University of Pittsburgh, who led the study.

However, even though people might not notice the difference during their daily routine, a slight decrease in alertness or coordination could be hazardous at times when people need all their abilities, such as when driving, Muldoon said.

To test this, Muldoon plans a follow-up to see how people taking cholesterol-lowering drugs do on driving simulations, as well as whether their job performance changes.

Muldoon speculated that the drugs could reduce mental functioning in several ways. For instance, cholesterol particles in the bloodstream are known to carry nutrients such as vitamin A. Further, lowering cholesterol could reduce the brain's supply of

chemicals it needs to manufacture signal-carrying proteins.

In the study, Muldoon administered a battery of tests to 194 men and women. Half got lovastatin, or Mevacor, a widely prescribed cholesterol-lowering drug, while the rest got dummy pills. Neither the volunteers nor the researchers knew which they were taking.

Six months later, everyone was tested again. The study found this time that people getting the drugs scored slightly lower than the others on several tests that measure attention and dexterity. There was no significant difference in their memory.

The differences were small, roughly in the range of 10 percent or less. For instance, in a minute-long test in which people had to fit small pegs into a board, those on the drug finished two seconds slower.

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