

Bell Atlantic accused in lawsuit of racially hostile environment

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Body

PHILADELPHIA - A group of current and former employees of Bell Atlantic Corp. filed a \$ 100 million federal lawsuit against the company Monday, charging that a racially hostile environment led to the suicides of three employees who worked at a company garage.

The lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court alleges that company executives did not do enough to address the discrimination allegations lodged by 10 plaintiffs against two men who were supervisors at the garage where the suicide victims worked.

Associated PressThe three workers, all black males, died between 1994 and 1997.

The white supervisors, Thomas Flaherty and Nick Pomponio, were named as defendants in the lawsuit.

Flaherty and Pomponio have since been transferred out of the garage, plaintiffs' attorney John Hermina said. Flaherty, reached by phone, referred comment to corporate attorneys, and a number the company provided for Pomponio was incorrect.

Joan Rasmussen, a Bell Atlantic spokeswoman in Arlington, Va., said Hermina had tried to file a similar lawsuit in federal court in Washington seeking class-action status but a judge "denied their claim of a pattern of discrimination."

Rasmussen declined to comment specifically on the Philadelphia lawsuit because she had not seen it, but said, "Discrimination is totally unacceptable in the workplace at Bell Atlantic."

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