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Woman sues Hechinger, executive

By **BRIAN WHEELER**
Staff Writer

An Annapolis woman has sued the Hechinger Co. and one of its executives for \$20 million, contending that she was the victim of sexual harassment that the company tolerated.

Deborah Savoie, former manager of the Landover-based chain's Annapolis store, alleges the company ignored several complaints against Gary Mercer of Arnold, a vice president who she maintains harassed her several times.

The lawsuit, filed March 15 in Prince

George's County Circuit Court, also alleges she was forced to resign from a new job last month after her company, a vendor for Hechinger, received complaints against her from the home improvement store chain.

At the time she was preparing to testify in a class-action lawsuit against Hechinger.

Ms. Savoie, a former 15-year Hechinger employee, said she first alerted company officials to Mr. Mercer's behavior in 1992 after he made suggestive remarks and touched her, the lawsuit says.

Ms. Savoie said in an interview that she never approached police with her complaints because she hoped company officials would take action against Mr. Mercer.

Mr. Mercer, the lawsuit says, also had sexually harassed women at another company before being hired — something the lawsuit contends Hechinger should have known.

A Hechinger spokesman declined comment on the allegations, and company officials said this morning that Mr. Mercer was on vacation. He didn't return a phone call to his home.

Ms. Savoie said that despite Mr. Mercer's harassment of her and other employees, company officials apparently did nothing.

Ms. Savoie said she left Hechinger in July 1993 after a maternity leave but dealt with the company while working for a vendor. In June 1994, she was in a Hechinger store in Laurel when Mr. Mercer grabbed her buttocks, the lawsuit says.

Ms. Savoie said this morning that she filed the lawsuit in part to send a message to the company.

Hechinger
- Savoie