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From ICE woes to EEOC complaint

A building maintenance firm that fired 1,200 illegal workers faces a bias charge from a group of replacement hires over pay and shirts.

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A janitorial service that recently fired 1,200 illegal workers in the state's biggest immigration crackdown now is being accused of discrimination in hiring replacement workers.

A complaint filed Wednesday with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission says a group of new workers, mainly inner-city blacks hired through a north Minneapolis employment agency, have been required to wear different colored T-shirts and receive lower pay than the rest of the new work crews hired by American Building Maintenance Co.

The complaint, by seven new hires and the SEIU Local 26, was also filed with the Minnesota Department of Human Rights.

ABM denies it discriminated against the roughly 65 new workers. The complaint is nothing more than a union tactic to improve its bargaining position, the company said.

"It [the complaint] is without any foundation in fact and maligns an excellent organization such as Emerge, which employs these ... workers," said Tony Mitchell, corporate spokesman for the San Francisco-based ABM Industries.

But workers such as Lamonte Jackson and Keyla Kahl say ABM's worker replacement hiring has created a group of second-class citizens. Both were hired in September at a rate of \$10.25 an hour -- more than \$2 less than hundreds of other replacement workers. Both said they were told they would be hired on a permanent basis after a 60-day probation, if not sooner, and then given a raise.

"They just keep saying there's a holdup in the paperwork," said Jackson, who with Kahl was among the workers filing the discrimination complaint. "But I'm still working around people doing the same job as me, getting paid a lot more."