

Chicago Factory Where Workers Had Sit-In To Close

Caryn Rousseau, Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Serious Energy Inc. said Thursday it will close a Chicago window factory that became a symbol of the plight of American workers more than three years ago when employees briefly occupied the building.

In response, United Electrical Workers spokeswoman Leah Fried said about 50 workers are again occupying the factory in an effort to stay employed.

"The workers are refusing to leave," Fried said. "This time we want the possibility of keeping these jobs."

Sunnyvale, Calif.-based Serious Energy said it will close its Chicago factory and consolidate manufacturing at facilities in Colorado and Pennsylvania, eliminating about 46 union and nonunion positions.

"Ongoing economic challenges in construction and building products, collapse in demand for window products, difficulty in obtaining favorable lease terms, high leasing and utility costs and taxes, and a range of other factors unrelated to labor costs, have compelled Serious to cease production at the Chicago facility," the company said in a statement.

The company said it will comply with any applicable legal and federal labor requirements. Serious Energy leases the 268,000-square-foot Chicago plant and said it has made substantial investments to retool the window and glass product facility and hire and train employees.

Serious Energy bought assets from Republic Windows and Doors, a factory that received national attention during a 2008 worker sit-in after owners gave employees just a few days' notice before Christmas that they were shutting down.

Vice President Joe Biden visited the reopened factory the following April when the facility was touted as an example of economic reinvigoration thanks to the federal stimulus. At the time, Serious Energy had started rehiring some of the more than 200 laid-off workers to make energy-efficient windows at the plant. Biden toured the factory in an industrial area on Chicago's North Side.

Source URL (retrieved on 03/06/2015 - 11:37am):

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