

# **Adidas: Asia Laborers Can Send Complaints Via Text**

Juergen Baetz, Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — German sports gear maker Adidas said Monday it is encouraging workers in factories of some of its Asian suppliers to anonymously share possible grievances directly with the company via text message.

The new hotline service will help bridge the communication gap between management and workers, enabling employees to "simply send an SMS when they feel their rights are breached," Adidas AG said.

Adidas' efforts to improve control of labor conditions coincide with a renewed debate on working conditions at the suppliers of Western firms in the wake of deadly incidents in Bangladesh's garment industry, where a factory building collapse last month has claimed at least 645 lives.

Adidas, which also owns the Reebok brand, said its SMS initiative was successfully tested since last year at an Indonesian supplier's factory and will now be rolled out to four other plants in that country and one in Vietnam.

Under the program, workers at a supplier can send text messages to their company's management but they will also be seen and monitored by Adidas directly.

"Problems can be detected early on and be tackled before they result in greater problems because of the direct, personal and simple communication," Adidas said, adding that the "vast majority" of its workers in Indonesia and Vietnam use cell phones.

During the test phase, workers have mostly used the SMS hotline to express grievances about issues such as their working environment, health insurance and the canteen, as well as on violence and harassment, the company said.

A spokesman for Adidas, Lars Mangels, had no immediate information on the total number of SMS complaints received from workers. Also, it was not immediately clear how many workers are employed in the factories where the program will be rolled out.

Western manufacturers often rely on suppliers in Asian nations where labor is cheaper. But under pressure from a critical audience at home, many companies are seeking new ways to uphold proper working conditions throughout their supply chain.

Some have already set up anonymous hotlines for factory workers' complaints, but

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Adidas argues that the SMS service goes a step further because it lowers the barrier to file a complaint even more.

"We are always striving to further improve the conditions for the employees in the factories of our suppliers," Adidas executive board member Glenn Bennett said.

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