

Muslim workers have not agreed to proposed change to meal schedule during month-long fast

(ST. PAUL, MN, 7/23/10) -- The Minnesota chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-MN) last week called on Swedish appliance manufacturer Electrolux to clarify a statement claiming that it will now offer legally-mandated religious accommodation to Muslim employees at its St. Cloud, MN, plant during the upcoming Ramadan fast.

Earlier in the week, CAIR-MN requested accommodation because of a new policy that prohibits all food on the production floor, except for food required by those with medical conditions such as diabetes.

Since that policy was put in place, Muslim employees, their union representatives, and CAIR-MN have worked to seek an accommodation to allow the workers to bring a snack onto the production floor to break their fast at sunset during the month of Ramadan. The time to break the fast changes daily.

In a news release distributed today by Electrolux, the company claimed it had adjusted its meal schedule so that Muslim employees would be able to break their fast at sunset.

But Muslim employees who filed an EEOC complaint against the company over the food policy say they were not engaged in the process. They have not yet accepted, or even had a chance to review, the company's proposal. The proposal has apparently been sent only to the union to review for compliance with the labor agreement.

It is unclear if the proposed schedule change would allow all employees to break their fast immediately after sunset each day in Ramadan. Additionally, according to the proposal, on most days, employees could only use the last 10 minutes of the new break time to end their fast and pray. This is because the time for sunset comes at the end of the break period.

"It is not possible for several hundred Muslim employees to break their fast, pray and eat their Ramadan meal in just a few minutes," said CAIR-MN Civil Rights Director Taneeza Islam.

The new proposal still does not allow food on the production floor, despite the fact that Electrolux already allows food in the production area for medical reasons. CAIR-MN says courts have ruled that if companies grant a medical accommodation, they must also offer similar religious accommodations.

CAIR-MN will meet with Muslim employees next week to discuss the proposal and to come to a decision on whether to accept or reject it.

Ramadan, which will begin on or about August 10, is the month on the Islamic lunar calendar during which Muslims abstain from food, drink and other sensual pleasures from break of dawn to sunset. Muslims break the fast each day with food and drink immediately after sunset.

CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil liberties group. Its mission is to enhance the

CAIR-MN: Electrolux asked to clarify Ramadan accommodation

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understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding.