

SANDIA LABS SUED FOR DISCRIMINATION AGAINST FEMALE EMPLOYEES



Three women are suing Sandia National Laboratories for “systemic and pervasive” discrimination against female employees in a federal class action suit filed in Albuquerque this week.

Two national law firms, Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein LLP and Outten & Golden LLP, filed the suit on behalf of two current employees and one recent retiree.

The women accuse Sandia of a pattern of gender discrimination that allegedly uses inherently-biased performance evaluations to stunt women’s ability to achieve higher pay and promotions. They also allege retaliation against female employees who complain about discrimination.

The suit describes “a corporate culture infected with gender bias.”

ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL

Sandia spokesmen told the Journal the lab cannot discuss pending legal matters.

The women are seeking class action certification that could result in back pay, monetary damages and changes on behalf of all female lab employees.

“These brave plaintiffs have taken the difficult step of filing a lawsuit that is intended not merely to help themselves but to change the playing field for women at Sandia,” said attorney Kelly Dermody in a statement.

The suit says an “unreliable” and “discriminatory” evaluation process, known as a “stack-ranking” system, undervalues female employees relative to male. Under the system, all employees in a

peer group are ranked on performance from one to five, with one as worst and five as best.

But caps limit the number who can receive higher grades, forcing many to accept lower rankings regardless of performance, the suit says. It says rankings are based on subjective “personality” or “behavior” factors that tend to favor males. Because those rankings are used to determine pay raises and promotions, the system stunts advancement for females, the suit said.

“In this system, female employees are systematically undervalued compared to their male peers because female employees receive, on average, lower rankings despite equal or better performance,” it said.

The women are suing Sandia Corp., a wholly-owned subsidiary of current lab manager Lockheed Martin Corp. Honeywell International is taking over in May, so it’s unclear who would ultimately be liable if the plaintiffs prevail in court, Anne Shaver, a partner with Cabraser Heimann & Bernstein, told the Journal.

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Sandia garnered national attention in 2015 when current director Jill Hruby became the first woman to head a national security lab in the U.S. About one third of Sandia's 11,500 employees in New Mexico and California are women.