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EPA action ensures that New Bedford industrial laundry will reduce air emissions

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New Bedford, MA A New Bedford industrial laundry company will take steps to significantly reduce air pollution from its operations under a settlement agreement recently finalized in federal district court. Under the settlement, which was filed concurrently with the complaint, Clean Rentals, Inc., which does business as “Clean Uniforms and More,” also paid a penalty of \$200,000 for its alleged violations of the Clean Air Act.

In business since 1959, the company began operating at its Church St. location in May 1998. The complaint alleges that it failed to apply for a permit required under the Clean Air Act’s new source review provisions.

The company rents uniforms, floor mats, towels, general linen supplies, etc. to its customers and then launders them as needed. Some of the towels are used by machine shops, furniture manufacturers and printing companies. When the dirty shop, furniture, and print towels are returned for laundering, they often contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs). These VOCs are released to the air as the towels are processed, washed, and dried.

Under the agreement, Clean Uniforms and More will put in place a capture and control system to reduce VOC emissions from the laundering of print, furniture and shop towels by at least 85%. This system will capture emissions from towel sorting areas, dryers, washers and wastewater treatment equipment and route them to a thermal oxidizer for treatment. In addition to a capture and control system, the consent decree requires Clean Rentals to conduct emissions testing and to apply for proper permits.

Over the past few years, EPA has conducted numerous inspections of industrial laundry facilities across New England in an effort to address Clean Air Act violations, and EPA has taken enforcement actions against AmeriPride, Cintas, Coyne, G&K, and Unifirst.

VOCs include a variety of chemicals that may produce adverse health effects, such as eye, nose, and throat irritation, headaches, nausea, and damage to liver, kidney, and central nervous system. Industrial laundries typically process hundreds of thousands of pounds of soiled towels per year in washers that can handle single loads of 500 pounds or more. As a result, although the VOC amounts on individual towels may be small, the total VOC emissions from these facilities can be significant.

Moreover, VOCs contribute to the formation of ground level ozone, which is not emitted directly into the air, but is created by chemical reactions between oxides of nitrogen and volatile organic compounds in the presence of sunlight. Emissions of VOCs from facilities such as industrial laundries contribute to ground level ozone. Breathing ozone can trigger a variety of health problems, particularly for children, the elderly, and anyone with lung diseases such as asthma. Ground level ozone can also have harmful effects on sensitive vegetation and ecosystems.