

Accusations cast shadow on Sunshine

There are storm clouds hovering above Sunshine Biscuit. The cookie company in Sayreville is being pelted with complaints of sexual harassment and discrimination. Three former female employees have taken their complaints to court.

In the eye of the storm is Raymond Page, the production manager at the Bordentown Avenue plant, who is named in all three suits.

The validity of some of the complaints, which date back to 1987, is scheduled to come under the scrutiny of a Superior Court jury when the first case goes on trial Tuesday.

The cookie company will face its first test from Danica Dahlstrom Rogers, who claims Page and a co-worker started to harass her after she became a cookie-cutter operator.



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Rogers — who was the only woman in her department, according to court papers prepared by her East Brunswick-based lawyer, Clara Smit — was approached by Page shortly after she became a machine operator in October 1987 and was told "meet me at the Sheraton at 6 p.m."

Rogers said that after she declined, Page went to the East Brunswick motel anyway, and expressed his anger at her the next day because she had not met him there.

She contends that, from then on, Page would stand close to her, touch her and wink at her. Once he put her hand in his pants pocket and laughed at her uneasiness, she said.

On another occasion, she said, he followed her into the bathroom.

In March 1993, Rogers' husband, plant manager Jim Rogers, was fired after he reported to the plant's vice president, John Potkul, that a company clerical employee, Monique Waldron, complained she was being sexually harassed by Page.

WEEK BACK

IN YOUR

Jim Rogers, Smit said, was not aware that his wife was experiencing similar problems with Page. Jim Rogers never challenged his firing, Smit said, because he feared that it would jeopardize his chances of getting another job in the cookie industry.

Jim Rogers, according to Smit, was not the first to be fired for discussing complaints of sexual harassment against Page with Potkul. The first was Margaret Dragon, the human resources director who was fired in 1992. She is also a client of Smit's and has filed a sexual-discrimination suit that is pending in Superior Court.

Danica Rogers resigned in December 1994 because she said she could not take the continual harassment.

According to the suit, Danica Rogers said that in May 1993, co-worker Ludwig Rogers also started to harass her. Danica Rogers said Ludwig Rogers would make harassing telephone calls to her in the plant, follow her, and watch her work. When she complained, she said, he told her "Raymond (Page) and John Potkul told him to check up on her."

She said he started to spread false rumors to other employees that she was having sexual relationships with current and former employees.

Rogers said in 1994 she was forced to take a two-month medical leave after injuring her back while lifting 88-pound bags of dough, weights heavier than male members of the department were expected to lift.