

Documented discipline rules save Leggett & Platt from charges

Johnny Mathis worked for eight years in the Monroe plant of Leggett & Platt when he was terminated for excessive absences. While admitting his absences violated Leggett & Platt policy, Mathis, who is black, sued for discrimination, claiming that white female co-workers were not similarly punished.

Leggett & Platt's attendance policy provided for termination if an employee's attendance fell below 92% in any four months over a 12-month period. Mathis' attendance was 88% in July 2003, 87% in September, 55% in November and 78% in December.

The company issued an oral warning in July and a written warning in September. It missed issuing a final written warning in November, and so gave Mathis a "pass" for that month. He received a final warning in December, and when his attendance in January also fell below 92%, he was terminated.

The court upheld the termination, finding that the company followed its policy to the letter. It also found that the three female employees who were not disciplined did not violate the attendance policy for five of 12 months, as Mathis had, and therefore could not be compared to him.