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Reebok gets thumbs up from anti-sweatshop group

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NEW YORK (AP) An anti-sweatshop group gave Reebok International its stamp of approval after it verified that the shoe and apparel maker had implemented standards protecting workers at its footwear factories around the world.

The Fair Labor Association, a nonprofit group formed in 1999 to promote adherence to international labor standards and improve working conditions, accredited Reebok on Thursday for substantially complying with its requirements over a two-year period.

That checklist includes meeting standards banning child labor, forced labor, abuse and discrimination, and guaranteeing health and safety of workers and freedom of association and collective bargaining.

The Fair Labor Association, based in Washington, uses unannounced visits to members' factories to check if these standards are being met.

A total of 12 apparel companies, including Adidas and Liz Claiborne, are participating in the group's programs. Participating companies also must internally monitor conditions in factories making their products.

Reebok is the first company to be accredited by the organization. The accreditation is subject to review every year.

"This is an important milestone in our ongoing efforts to improve working conditions around the world," Doug Cahn, vice president of human rights programs at Reebok, said Friday.

The Canton, Massachusetts-based company has contracts with at least 45 independent footwear factories around the world, many of them in China, Indonesia and Thailand. All of its shoes are assembled outside the United States.

Reebok, which joined the Fair Labor Association in 1999, is considered a leader in the apparel industry when it comes to protecting workers' rights, said Anne Lally, coordinator of outreach and transparency.

In 1992, the company was the first in its industry to adopt a code of conduct calling for decent working conditions and started systematic inspections of factories that produced its products. It has since adopted a list of human rights production standards.

The association noted in a press release that Reebok had set up a system allowing factory workers to confidentially report code concerns directly to local compliance officers.

It also said Reebok had become a leader in allowing workers in China to participate in forms of worker representation to factory management. In the accreditation process, companies designate which part of their business will be evaluated over

either a two- or a three-year period. Reebok agreed to a two-year implementation process for its shoe business and a three-year period for its apparel business.

Reebok: www.reebok.com

Fair Labor Association: www.fairlabor.org