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LAWMAKERS FILE COMPLAINT TO LAUNCH INVESTIGATION INTO COVID-19 OUTBREAK AT WATERLOO TYSON PLANT; 192 CONFIRMED POSITIVE CASES IN BLACK HAWK

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LAWMAKERS FILE OSHA COMPLAINT TO LAUNCH INVESTIGATION INTO COVID-19 OUTBREAK AT WATERLOO TYSON PLANT

Waterloo, Iowa -- In response to the growing outbreak of Coronavirus in Black Hawk County, three Waterloo lawmakers filed an OSHA complaint late Saturday to protect employees and their community. The workplace safety complaint against Tyson Fresh Meats was filed with the Iowa Division of Labor OSHA Enforcement Division.

“Given the huge spike in positive cases in Black Hawk County over the last week, the accounts we’ve heard from employees at Tyson can no longer be ignored. We need immediate action from Governor Reynolds and Tyson to stop the outbreak in our community, protect workers, and save lives,” said State Rep. Ras Smith of Waterloo, who filed the complaint. “The longer they wait, the worse the destruction in our community will be.”

The complaint filed by Rep. Smith, Rep. Timi Brown-Powers, and Sen. Bill Dotzler alleges multiple violations of the federal Occupational Safety & Health Administration standards. After Tyson was notified of a positive case of an employee by Black Hawk County health officials, the complaint alleges:

1. Tyson Fresh Meats failed to protect its employees from exposure to recognized COVID-19 hazard in the workplace

2. Tyson did not act on useful CDC mitigation methods deemed effective when utilized by various other industries

From April 9 to April 18, the number of COVID-19 cases in Black Hawk County rose from 20 to 192, a 900% increase. On Friday, local officials in Waterloo joined together to call on Governor Reynolds and Tyson to stem the growing outbreak of COVID-19 by temporarily closing the plant, cleaning it to protect employees, and then reopening as quickly as possible. The Governor sent additional tests to Waterloo on Friday, but the plant remains open and state officials still refuse to disclose how many positive cases are directly tied to the plant.

“The accounts we’ve heard from employees at Tyson are deeply troubling. In addition to not providing enough personal protective equipment for workers, sending workers from the Columbus Junction plant that closed weeks ago due to an outbreak to work in Waterloo without testing those employees first is wrong,” said Rep. Timi Brown-Powers.

The letter sent by lawmakers on Friday cited several accounts by employees of Tyson, including:

- Employee informs health care provider in Waterloo that they are in Waterloo working at the Tyson plant due to the closure of their home site in Columbus Junction; employee later tests positive for COVID-19 in Waterloo
- Employee recounts that sufficient Personal Protective Equipment is not being provided by the employer
- Employees recount that social distancing measures are only applied in the breakrooms, not on the operations floor or locker rooms
- Employees inform that nurse is unable to accurately conduct temperature checks and using insufficient device
- Tyson site management resist slowing production to adequately adjust to CDC best practices
- Due the diverse and multilingual nature of the employee population, ineffective communication has led to non-English speaking employees believing they can return to work while ill

A similar plant in Columbus Junction remains closed due to a COVID-19 outbreak and another Tyson plant in Perry, Iowa reported a positive case this weekend.

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2 attachments

 **4-17-20-TysonLetter.pdf**
146K

 **Tyson-complaint.pdf**
970K

