

SPEEA preparing lawsuit against Spirit AeroSystems over employee ratings



WICHITA – Due to Spirit AeroSystems’ refusal to honor the contractual grievance process regarding significant and unilateral changes to the employee rating system, the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace (SPEEA), IFPTE Local 2001, is preparing to file a lawsuit to compel arbitration by an independent arbitrator.

SPEEA is pursuing this lawsuit on behalf of more than 900 engineers and technical workers in SPEEA bargaining units. In the normal course of events, disputes regarding alleged violations of the collective bargaining agreements would be taken to an independent arbitrator who would render a final judgment. Spirit AeroSystems is refusing to honor the contractual grievance process.

The dispute arises from the unilateral implementation of a new Performance Management (PM) process. Whereas employees had been instructed (as negotiated with SPEEA) that their PM rating would be based upon their individual performance, management unilaterally adopted secret new rating criteria that downgraded more than 900 employees based upon “company performance.”

“This wasn’t just moving of the goalposts,” said SPEEA Executive Director **Ray Goforth**. “This was switching games altogether. Employees who had been rated highly throughout the year suddenly found themselves rated as marginal performers because of their managers’ mistakes.”

Performance ratings are used to grant raises, give promotions and in extreme cases, terminate employees. Steps in the process are negotiated and included in the union contract between represented employees and Spirit.

SPEEA also filed an Unfair Labor Practice with the National Labor Relations Board because Spirit’s actions violate both the Wichita Engineering Unit (WEU) and Wichita Technical and Professional Unit (WTPU) contracts.

“There is no way, on any level, the changes Spirit made treat employees with dignity or respect,” said SPEEA Midwest Director **Bob Brewer** said. “Spirit’s values of open and honest communication do not stand up against their actions.”

SPEEA urges Spirit to return to the agreed-upon evaluation process that rated employees on their individual work product rather than something outside of their control such as “company performance” or the price of Spirit stock.

“The incompetent and unilateral conduct of Spirit labor relations management is bleeding the company,” said Goforth. “Employees are voting with their feet. Spirit has double-digit attrition among its engineering professionals and those that remain are calling upon the Board of Directors to replace the company’s management.”

Timeline of events leading up to lawsuit

- November 2011 – Spirit trained its managers on Performance Management ratings to align employee ratings with company performance without any discussion with the union or employees.
- Feb. 1 - SPEEA filed a Step 3 Grievance on the 2011 Final Performance Management Rating changes.
- Feb. 13 – SPEEA filed Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) charges against Spirit with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) for failure to bargain.
- Feb. 28 – Spirit denied a SPEEA data request for Performance Management Define documents - stating they don’t have to provide the data.
- March – Spirit responded to the NLRB charge by SPEEA.
- April – SPEEA responded to the NLRB regarding Spirit’s response and prepares to file a lawsuit to compel arbitration.

A local of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE), SPEEA represents more than 25,700 aerospace professionals at Boeing, Spirit AeroSystems in Kansas, Triumph Composite Systems, Inc., in Spokane, Wash., and BAE Systems, Inc., in Irving, Texas.

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