

✓ GAYS AND LESBIANS SJM JUL 2 1 1993

2 lesbians charge bias, sue firm

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Two Santa Cruz women who say they were exposed to workplace intimidation ranging from pornographic magazines to attempts on their lives by angry quarry workers filed a lawsuit Tuesday against RMC Lonestar, a Davenport cement manufacturer.

Charlene Clendenin, 34, and Susan Amspoker, 37, seek unspecified damages for sexual harassment, job discrimination and civil rights violations based on gender and sexual orientation.

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Clendenin was fired from her job as haul truck operator at the company's Bonny Doon limestone quarry in March. She began work there in 1978. Amspoker, her roommate and lesbian lover, has worked as a janitor at RMC Lonestar since 1990. The couple met at work.

The suit, filed in Santa Cruz County Superior Court, says several male employees "make life miserable" for the handful of female workers at the company's rural facilities without fear of retribution from supervisors or union officials. The supervisors, the suit alleges, ignored Clendenin's

complaints about life-threatening safety violations in the quarry and passed Amspoker over for promotions three times in favor of men with less experience.

Company officials had little to say about the lawsuit.

Satish Sheth, plant manager, was traveling on business on the East Coast.

Other top managers said they couldn't offer substantial comment because they hadn't seen the lawsuit yet.

"We've heard these things before, and

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Cement firm sued

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every time we've addressed them," said Bill Buck, manager of maintenance and engineering.

Between 1978 and 1985, the suit says, men at the quarry regularly asked Clendenin if her breasts were "real" or silicone; they also left pornographic centerfolds at job-site rest areas. On one occasion, the suit alleges, they molded an image of a penis into her grease bucket and attached a note reading "all for you C.C."

Petitioned supervisors

When she complained, and later petitioned supervisors for a women's restroom facility at the quarry, several co-workers began a campaign to drive her to quit, the suit charges.

From 1989 to March 1993, four heavy-machinery operators rolled huge boulders down the sides of the 200-foot deep quarry, narrowly missing the truck she was driving, according to the lawsuit.

On July 22, 1992, the suit says, supervisors saw bulldozer operator Frank Locatelli pushing large boulders off the edge of a quarry "bench" without checking to see if there were any trucks operating below, a violation of federal safety regulations. One of those boulders, which the suit describes as "the size of a Volkswagen Bug," rolled down two benches — large earthen ledges — and stopped less than 10 yards from Clendenin's truck.

If the rock had hit her truck, she contends, it would have knocked it off its bench, down 90 feet to the bottom of the quarry, killing her.

Locatelli did not return a phone message seeking comment.

When she filed formal complaints, quarry supervisor James L. Lake "chastised her in front of her co-workers" on Nov. 20 in the plant's lunchroom.

Afterward, managers began complaining she was "crazy," "paranoid" and needed psychiatric help.

On Jan. 4, Locatelli took a running start with his front-end load-

er to dump boulders into her hauling truck, the suit charges. He did not give her a warning and despite wearing a seat belt she was thrown to the ceiling of the truck and suffered a sprained neck and bruises, the suit says.

The plant safety committee investigated and issued Clendenin a warning for failing to communicate properly with fellow workers and improper operation of her truck.

She filed a grievance with her local union, but no action was taken. She hired a lawyer and in March was fired for insubordination.

Amspoker was passed over for promotions between 1991 and 1992. Supervisors chose people with less seniority for position of loader-dozer operator, mechanic apprentice and a position in the process department. Each time she filed grievances with the union, but nothing happened, the suit says.

Co-workers also regularly pinned up pornographic pictures in areas she had to clean and left jokes derogatory to gays and ethnic minority groups in her workspace, according to the suit.

'Boys will be boys'

Responding to the women's complaints, production manager Frank Della Santina said, "Boys will be boys. It's a man's workplace; you'd better get used to it," the suit says.

The women are represented by Jennifer Drobac, a Santa Cruz attorney who filed a sexual harassment lawsuit against software pioneer Larry Michels and his company, the Santa Cruz Operation Inc., in December on behalf of four secretaries. The company paid the women \$1.25 million in a settlement.

"Once you drive into this quarry, you have a niche with its own culture," Drobac said. "This is a man's world more similar to the turn of 19th century than today."

Drobac said that Clendenin "is absolutely devastated" she was fired.

"These women just want to earn a living," she said. "They want to do their job free of the most degrading kind of abuse."