

# **Waste Management brings in strikebreakers against Seattle drivers**

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Waste hauling giant Waste Management Inc. brought in professional strikebreakers against a strike by its recycling drivers in Seattle, Washington on Friday.

The contract between Teamsters Local 117 and the company expired on May 31. Negotiations were halted on June 15 by the federal mediator due to the refusal of Waste Management to respond to the union's proposals. Waste Management had presented its "last, best and final" offer on June 6, offering a six-year contract that, according to its web site, contained an average of four percent increase in wages and benefits along with a \$2,000 "signing bonus".

Among the issues in dispute is a \$9 an hour pay gap between the recycling drivers and the garbage drivers, who are in a different union but have not crossed picket lines and have ceased work.

On Sunday night the union raised a proposal to the federal mediator to get negotiations resumed. Waste Management was said to be reviewing the proposal Monday.

While vehicles were delayed by picketing at the six collection stations, the bus carrying strikebreakers got through and they were making pickups on Monday.

The replacement drivers are being used primarily to collect garbage at commercial establishments. Waste Management had long planned to continue operations during a strike. In June it flew in and housed out-of-state strikebreakers and contracted with the notorious Huffmaster firm, which specializes in the logistics of breaking strikes. Barricades, flood lights, and barbed wire have been added to the fencing around the company's depot, and additional security has been deployed.

Waste Management is the largest waste haulage company in the United States with operations in Canada and Puerto Rico. With 45,000 employees and

20 million customers, it earned \$13.4 billion in 2011, an increase of 6.9 percent over the previous year. Last week it announced a restructuring of its operations to decrease costs by one percent. The company plans to eliminate a layer of management at the "group level" and lay off 700 employees. It anticipates continued cost-cutting measures over the next two years.

The response of the Teamsters to the provocative actions of Waste Management has been to appeal to the company to resume negotiations, promising to remove the picketers if they would return to the bargaining table. Waste Management insisted that it will not consider negotiations until the workers return to work. The union has filed numerous complaints with the National Labor Relations Board against the company over bad-faith bargaining and coercion of employees.

Meanwhile, the city of Seattle, headed by Democratic Mayor Michael Patrick McGinn, is encouraging Waste Management to break the strike. According to an interview by Associated Press and King 5 News, Timothy Croll, solid waste director for Seattle Public Utilities, said, "The company is well aware of the choices they could make. One is settling; another is replacement drivers." The city can impose fines on Waste Management of \$1.25 million a day if service is halted for more than a week.

A two-month lockout of garbage haulers by the second largest waste hauler, Republic Services Inc., in Evansville, Indiana was suspended last month with workers returning to work without a contract. Republic Services facilities across the country had been picketed in the course of a dispute that centered on company contributions to the Teamsters' Central State Pension Fund, which is in precarious financial shape. The company was insisting on introducing 401(k) plan in its place.

In the course of that struggle, sanitation workers from the Evansville facility travelled to Milpitas, California to conduct a picket at the Republic hauling yard, landfill and recycling facility there. Far from being an effort to expand the strike in order to effectively shut down all of Republic Service operations, the striking workers were instead involved in a stunt by the union to conduct a protest picket for one day. Over 200 workers at Milpitas honored the picket line.

Republic Services made \$589 million in profits in 2011, a 16.4 percent increase over 2010.



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