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**PRESS RELEASE**

**Mason County Forest Products to Pay \$900,000 to Settle a Sexual Harassment Case Brought by The Blankenship Law Firm and the Federal Government.**

*Mason County Forest Products, a lumber mill located in Shelton, Washington, and its parent company agree to pay \$900,000 to two former employees who alleged that they were repeatedly sexually harassed and retaliated against by male employees, including management.*

Former Mason County Forest Product employees Debbie Bernsten and Lorrie Haskins settled their federal court sexual harassment and retaliation case for \$900,000.

Lead trial counsel for the employees, Seattle attorney Scott C. G. Blankenship and associate attorney Nazik Youssef of The Blankenship Law Firm, P.S., negotiated the settlement during a court-ordered mediation, along with U.S. Equal Opportunity Commission (“EEOC”) lead counsel Teri Healy, Damien Lee, and Supervisory Trial Attorney John Stanley. The trial was set to begin in November 2011 in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington at Seattle.

In the lawsuit initiated by the EEOC (CV 09-5609 RBL), Ms. Bernsten and Ms. Haskins charged that they were repeatedly sexually harassed by their supervisor, as well as other male employees, at the Shelton, Washington lumber mill.

The allegations included claims that the women were subjected to sexually abusive behavior, including abusers maintaining pornography and sexual graffiti in the unisex porta-potties, harassing the women with the use of sex toys, making sexually charged comments and insults, simulating masturbation behind the victims, and engaging in physically threatening conduct such as locking the women in the porta-potties. Ms.

Bernsten and Ms. Haskins alleged that although management was well aware of such misconduct, they failed to address it or discipline the harassers and instead retaliated against the women. Ms. Bernsten also alleged that she was retaliated against for opposing discriminatory conduct by Mason County Forest Products against its Hispanic workers.

Other women complained of similar discriminatory treatment. Ms. Bernsten stated: “I am grateful that when no one else would listen, the EEOC and the justice system did. I feel that the system actually worked, and I hope this makes other women more willing to come forward with complaints.”

Sexual harassment and discrimination, as well as retaliation for opposing such conduct, violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Washington Law Against Discrimination (WLAD). Prosecution through private counsel subjected Mason County Forest Products to a potential jury verdict that would have included punitive damages under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and 42 U.S.C. § 1981, and the broader protection of Washington law.

“Whether it is a saw mill or the boardroom, the law requires that women in the workplace not suffer from sexual bias, innuendo, or harassment. Employers who do not understand this should expect to suffer severe consequences under the law,” said Seattle lawyer Scott Blankenship. “What happened to Ms. Bernsten and Ms. Haskins was inexcusable, and hopefully this result will deter other employers from engaging in this type of conduct in the future.”

The Blankenship Law Firm, P.S., is an AV-rated law firm located in downtown Seattle with lawyers licensed in Washington, Oregon, and Alaska. The firm practice emphasizes employment law, including representing employees in all phases of negotiation and litigation. More information is available online at [www.blankenshiplawfirm.com](http://www.blankenshiplawfirm.com).