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LEGAL AFFAIRS

## Local suit is aimed at Sanofi-Aventis

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Columnist

Two weeks after suing **Tyson Foods Inc.** for allegedly failing to pay workers for "donning and doffing" time, the same lawyers have filed a similar action against **Sanofi-Aventis U.S.**

The suit alleges that the pharmaceutical giant failed to pay Kansas City production workers for the time they needed to put on and remove specialized protective gear and to walk to and from their workstations.

The suit, which was filed last week in federal court in Kansas City, seeks class-action status. Attorneys for the two named plaintiffs, Gary W. Qualls and Eddy D. Reber, said employees eligible to join the case could number in the hundreds.

"Even though Sanofi-Aventis has been on notice for many months that they are required to pay for all working time, the company has not changed its pay practices," said one of the plaintiffs' attorneys, George A. Hanson of **Stueve Siegel Hanson Woody.**

Mark Green, a spokesman for Sanofi-Aventis, said the company does not comment on pending litigation.

The suit comes after the **U.S. Supreme Court** ruled in November that **IBP Inc.**, which was acquired by Tyson in 2001, had to pay workers at a meat plant in Washington for the time they spent donning and doffing goggles, frocks, chain-linked metal aprons, leggings and arm guards.

The lawsuit against Sanofi-Aventis alleges that production workers at the Kansas City facility weren't paid for changing into sterile scrubs, transition shoes, protective jumpsuits, safety glasses, hair nets and other protective gear. It also claims that they weren't paid for walking to and from changing, work and break areas.

Sanofi-Aventis, the world's third-largest drugmaker, has a major presence in south Kansas City, where it operates a manufacturing plant near the intersection of Interstates 435 and 470. The plant employs about 500 people.

The plant was once the home of **Marion Laboratories.**

### New Blackwell office

**Blackwell Sanders Peper Martin** has recruited three Lincoln, Neb., lawyers and opened an office in that city specializing in water rights.

The three, formerly with the firm of **Fennemore Craig**, will practice under Blackwell Sanders' environmental/toxic tort practice group.

Dave Fenley, Blackwell Sanders' chairman, said the trio's practice covers an area of growing national importance.

"High-profile, high-stakes battles are already being waged in the area of water rights, and we expect the level of activity to continue to increase and become more heated," he said.

Blackwell Sanders, with 314 attorneys, is one of the largest law firms based in Kansas City.

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