

News & Types: Employment, Labor & Benefits Update

Chicago Man Stabs Union Rat Balloon

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Practices: Employment, Labor & Benefits

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When unions want to inform the public of a dispute with a company, they are increasingly using giant, inflatable balloons in the shape of a rat. These rats are most frequently seen at construction sites, where unions use them to avoid federal laws prohibiting certain types of picketing. As "informational picketing," unions can place the rat at the company's location and the union's members may post themselves at the site indefinitely. The union's members may not walk back and forth, which would turn the informational picketing into other types of picketing restricted by federal law.

In downtown Chicago, a member of the public got his revenge against one of the inflated rats. We do not know if the man or his company were the target of the union's protest. The Chicago media reported that union workers posted a rat in front of the man's car, blocking him from leaving. When the man asked that the rat be removed, the union's members reportedly refused. Not taking "no" for an answer, the man allegedly pulled out a box cutter and stabbed the rat. The rat deflated and the man was able to move his car. A criminal? Police arrested him for criminal damage to property and aggravated assault – on an inflated rat! A better response? According to one story making the rounds about a rat inflated in front of a business, the business owner rented an inflatable cat and posted the cat on the roof, looking down hungrily at the rat. Next time you see an inflated rat, look closely at the union members' activities. If they are walking back and forth holding picket signs, a violation of federal law may be occurring.