

Los Angeles Times

8 inches; 274 words

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 09, 2005, BUSINESS, PART C, PAGE 3
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Fox News Is Sued by U.S. Over Alleged Harassment

By Matea Gold

NEW YORK—The federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has sued News Corp.'s Fox News Network, alleging that it subjected female employees to sexual harassment and a hostile work environment.

Steve Mintz, an attorney for the cable network, called the lawsuit "legally baseless." The EEOC filed the lawsuit Monday in U.S. District Court in Manhattan.

The commission alleges that Joe Chillemi, a vice president in the network's advertising and promotions department, "routinely used gross obscenities and vulgarities when describing women or their body parts" and "routinely cursed at and otherwise denigrated women employees and treated them in a demeaning way," among other allegations.

The suit stems out of a claim made by Kim Weiler, a former freelance production assistant who worked in the promotions department for 13 months.

Judy Keenan, a senior trial attorney for the commission, said that at least two other women had reported similar treatment. According to the suit, Fox News retaliated against Weiler — who left the network in March 2004 — when she complained.

Mintz disputed that charge, saying that Weiler never reported any discrimination or harassment while working at Fox News.

Mintz said that although Chillemi might have used some of the language cited in the suit, his words were not directed at female employees and did not violate anti-discrimination laws.

"It is clear that Fox News does not condone or encourage the use of foul language, and we are taking and have taken steps regarding the appropriate language to be used," Mintz said. "In reality, it does occur in the workplace, including news organizations and probably even the EEOC."

"At worst," he added, "this is a minor incident of swearing."

Times Staff Writer