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<http://www.constructiondive.com/news/ct-contractor-ordered-to-pay-workers-34m-in-racial-discrimination-suit/416315/>

CT contractor ordered to pay workers \$3.4M in racial discrimination suit



By [Kim Slowey](#)

Dive Brief:

- A federal court in Connecticut has ruled that painting contractor Safety Marking Inc. must pay two former employees more than \$1.5 million each for creating a hostile working environment and for race discrimination, according to the Connecticut Post.
- The lawsuit alleged that Yosif Bakhit, a Muslim Sudanese-American, and Kiyada Miles, who is African-American, were subjected to "a pattern of abuse" for years, ranging from racial and ethnic insults and slurs to being passed over for promotions in favor of less-experienced white employees.
- An attorney for Safety Marking said it will appeal but had no other comment. The company, with offices in Connecticut, Rhode Island and New York, is a regular winner of major state and airport contracts for road and runway painting projects.

Dive Insight:

According to the complaint, a year after Bakhit started working at Safety Marking, offensive racial comments and situations began to occur, such as comparing Bakhit to a black doll, giving him the worst assignments and throwing bananas at him. Miles said he also endured such racial comments but, in addition, observed a fellow African-American worker being dragged alongside a work vehicle for two blocks.

According to the Post, Bakhit said he filed a complaint with the company in 2012, but that his concerns fell on deaf ears. Bakhit's lawyer said that soon after making the complaint, Bakhit found his car window smashed with a rock.

Diversity concerns are an ongoing issue in the construction industry, as construction has struggled to draw minorities and women. In an [EFCG survey](#) of A/E/C firms of varying sizes, the group found that none of the surveyed firms had minorities in their executive suite. And in a [report](#) last month, the New York Building Congress reported that the percentage of women and minority workers in the city's construction industry dropped last year — a fact the city found "concerning."

During the Associated General Contractors of America Convention earlier this month, [experts pointed to](#) improving diversity as one of the key ways to solve the ongoing labor shortage and to create a more productive industry. They advised that companies form diversity steering committees, perform culture audits or surveys of the staff, and raise awareness of the issue throughout all levels of a construction firm.