

**PJ Star: Tension rising between Caterpillar Inc. and UAW**

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EAST PEORIA —

Tension between Caterpillar Inc. and the United Auto Workers has started to escalate as the two sides draw nearer to contract negotiations.

Caterpillar has started preparing its managers and salaried personnel to man assembly lines in the event of a strike next spring, when the contract with the UAW expires. The union is claiming the company is creating a hostile work environment.

Fifty or so members of UAW Local 974 rallied outside the Caterpillar foundry at Mapleton early Tuesday to protest company job shadowing activities they said were akin to bullying tactics and to send the message they won't be intimidated.

"The company is bullying us, looking over our shoulders while we do our jobs and telling our guys they are learning our jobs in case of a strike," Local 974 President Dave Chapman said during a news conference at the union hall in East Peoria.

The company has not made any threats, he said, "but our guys think it's intimidation and it creates a hostile work environment."

What the company is doing, Chapman contended, "is violating its own code of conduct our members are expected to follow."

Rick DeGroot, Local 974 bargaining chairman, said the rally was before the work shift started so as not to violate the code of conduct. "It's tough when the company isn't held to the same standard we are," he said.

Negotiations to replace the contract that expires March 1, 2011, haven't been scheduled yet, but are likely to begin no later than in January, Chapman said.

Since the 1990s, Caterpillar has had its non-union and management personnel learn assembly jobs so the plants can continue to operate if the UAW strikes. The tactic helped the company continue to be profitable during a lengthy UAW strike in the mid-1990s, leading to a 1998 contract.

There was no work stoppage prior to a new agreement being ratified in early 2005.

But the company acknowledged it is preparing the same way.

"Contingency workforce training is currently under way involving Caterpillar management and support employees. The same process was utilized prior to 2004 labor negotiations. It is a normal part of our planning cycle ahead of any potential business interruption," the company said in a statement issued Tuesday.

"The company's contingency workforce planning efforts are about serving our customers by having work plans, standard processes, safety procedures, policies and people ready to deploy in the event of any business interruption."

Chapman said another concern for the union is that Caterpillar is wasting money by having two or more people learning the same job, money it could be spending on rewarding employees with a contract offer that they can accept.

"This company is making billions. It would be very easy for it to reward its employees. We want an agreement, not a strike. That's good for us, good for the company and good for the community," he said.

When the negotiations start, he said, "We'll see if they are going to use those billions to get an agreement or beat us over the head."

Chapman said the UAW has discussed whether to file an unfair labor practice complaint, but he noted the company is not violating the existing contract.

Chapman said Local 974 and other Caterpillar locals have been having internal meetings to prepare for negotiations. A meeting of the central bargaining committee, which includes leaders of all the Caterpillar locals and UAW International, is scheduled to occur shortly after Thanksgiving, he said.