

More workers claiming 'wage theft'

By Steven Greenhouse, New York Times

MIRA LOMA – Week after week, Guadalupe Rangel worked seven days straight, sometimes 11 hours a day, unloading dining room sets, trampolines, television stands and other imports from Asia that would soon be shipped to Walmart stores.

Even though he often clocked 70 hours a week at the Schneider warehouse here, he was never paid time-and-a-half overtime, he said. And now, having joined a lawsuit involving hundreds of warehouse workers, Rangel stands to receive more than \$20,000 in back pay as part of a recent \$21 million legal settlement with Schneider, a national trucking company.

"Sometimes I'd work 60, even 90 days in a row," said Rangel, a soft-spoken immigrant from Mexico. "They never paid overtime."

The lawsuit is part of a flood of recent cases – brought in California and across the nation – that accuse employers of violating minimum wage and overtime laws, erasing work hours and wrongfully taking employees' tips. Worker advocates call these practices "wage theft," insisting it has become far too prevalent.

Some federal and state officials agree. They assert that more companies are violating wage laws than ever before, pointing to the record number of enforcement actions they have pursued. They complain that more employers – perhaps motivated by fierce competition or a desire for higher profits – are flouting wage laws.

Many business groups counter that government officials have drummed up a flurry of wage enforcement actions, largely to score points with union allies. If anything, employers have

become more scrupulous in complying with wage laws, the groups say, in response to the much publicized lawsuits about so-called off-the-clock work that were filed against Walmart and other large companies a decade ago.

Read the whole story