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Chrysler Traces Costly Paint Blemish Problem to Antiperspirant Use

Toledo, Ohio (Associated Press) – Paint line workers at Chrysler Corporation's Jeep plant were asked to stop using antiperspirants after the company discovered that falling flakes left costly blemishes on the new Jeeps.

Some 380 workers who wash, wipe and prepare Jeep Cherokees and Comanches to be painted were asked to stop using all antiperspirants and some deodorants that can flake. Chrysler said its investigation showed that antiperspirants worn by workers flaked and fell onto the new paint. Antiperspirants contain compounds of aluminium, chlorine and silicon, which can damage paint. The paint flows away from the fallen flake, causing a visible depression the size of the tip of a baby's finger, the company said.

The company looked at the matter after officials noticed that every vehicle coming off the line had 20 to 50 imperfections on the roof and hood. Such damage can be enough for an inspector to send a car back for thousands of dollars of repairs. Chrysler would not say how much it had cost to fix the blemishes.

Even though the workers wear gloves, hair nets and coveralls, flakes escaped through clothing or fell out of sleeves or collars, the company said.

The problem is unusual, said a Kelly Gillespie, a spokeswoman for Proctor and Gamble, which makes several brands of antiperspirants. "If particles are falling on the car, they must be huge particles. People must put on an enormous amount of antiperspirant," she said.

Workers were initially sceptical that antiperspirants could cause such damage. "People said 'I'm not sweating hard enough that a droplet of sweat would fall on the car,'" said Jerry Herrendeen, the plant's manager of manufacturing engineering.

One woman filed a grievance last year after her supervisor asked to check her armpits. "We went to the company and said, 'We're not going to allow you to individually pick out our people and take them off the line,'" said Ronald Conrad, chairman of the United Auto Workers' Jeep unit. The issue was resolved when employees helped the company develop an awareness program.

"The flaking seems to be decreasing," said Jimmy Stochowski, who has worked in the paint shop for 28 years.

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