Michigan joins list of schools scrapping deals with Russell

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ANN ARBOR, Mich. (AP) — The University of Michigan said Monday it is ending its licensing agreement with Russell Corp. over what it says is the apparel-maker's denial of workers' rights at a plant in Honduras.

Russell closed the plant in Choloma, Honduras, in 2007 after 750 of 1,800 workers formed a union.

Phone and e-mail messages seeking company comment were left after business hours Monday. Russell is owned by Omaha-based Berkshire Hathaway Inc. The company has said it closed the plant because of shifts in demand and not to thwart union organizing.

Cornell University said Friday it was cutting ties to Russell, following Georgetown, Wisconsin, Miami, Rutgers, Houston, Columbia and Purdue universities.

University of Michigan spokeswoman Kelly Cunningham said Monday a panel at the Ann Arbor school found Russell broke its own rules and violated workers' freedom of association.

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"The U-M President's Advisory Committee on Labor Standards and Human Rights has been monitoring freedom of association issues in Russell Corporation factories in Honduras since 2007," Cunningham said in a news release.

She said the university was acting on the committee's recommendation.

"The committee found that the company had not respected the employees' right to association and had not adhered to the company's own standards of conduct," Cunningham said. "We do not feel that continuing the license is appropriate."

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