

CASE STUDY

A COSTLY OVERSIGHT: WHAT ABM INDUSTRIES' LAWSUIT TEACHES US ABOUT SCREENING HIRES IN THE CLEANING INDUSTRY

THE SITUATION

ABM Industries, one of the largest janitorial service providers in the U.S., faced multiple lawsuits after female janitors reported years of sexual harassment, assault, and retaliation by supervisors.

In one high-profile case, three night-shift janitors in California filed a federal suit after reporting repeated abuse and threats. One of the accused supervisors had a known criminal record. Prior to this, ABM had already settled a 2010 class-action lawsuit for \$5.8 million brought by the EEOC for similar claims. Despite this, abusive supervisors continued to be hired, promoted, or transferred across locations.

WHAT WENT WRONG

- Supervisors were not consistently vetted for criminal or sexual misconduct histories
- Offenders were able to move between job sites without a tracking system in place
- No ongoing monitoring or re-screening protocols were enforced
- Workers had limited English proficiency and operated in isolated, night-shift environments with little oversight
- Complaints were ignored or led to retaliation, creating a culture of silence

WHAT COULD HAVE PREVENTED IT

This wasn't a fluke, it was a failure of company due diligence. A \$30 background check could have prevented all of this. This entire situation could have been prevented with a basic, consistent background check process.

- Criminal background checks would have flagged supervisors with histories of assault and harassment, before they were ever handed keys to an empty building.
- Cross-site screening protocols would have prevented known offenders from being quietly transferred or rehired under the radar.

INDUSTRY:

Commercial Cleaning

COMPANY:

ABM Industries

ISSUE:

Sexual harassment and assault by supervisors over multiple years

CONSEQUENCES:

Federal lawsuits, class action settlement, public backlash, and \$5.8M in damages

- Verified employment history and ID checks would have given managers a full picture of who they were hiring, not just a name on a form.
- Consistent screening policies would have sent a clear message: this company doesn't look the other way.

The cost of skipping these steps? Millions in legal fees, and the company's reputation ruined amongst their customers. As of the latest reporting, additional negotiations with the EEOC were still ongoing, meaning ABM faced the risk of further financial, legal, and operational consequences: including mandated oversight, increased compliance monitoring, or new consent decrees.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR CLEANING COMPANIES

The janitorial industry has a high rate of worker vulnerability, many employees work alone, at night, and in off-site facilities. Without proper screening and monitoring, companies risk legal exposure, contract loss, and long-term brand damage.

HOW SURE CHECK HELPS

- Role-specific screening packages tailored for frontline, supervisory, or night-shift staff
- Criminal background and sex offender checks
- Continuous monitoring and re-checks
- Centralized reporting dashboards for multi-site operations
- Fast, compliant onboarding with support for Spanish-speaking staff

Sure Check helps cleaning companies screen smarter, reduce turnover, and protect the people they serve.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Negligent hiring isn't just a legal liability, it's a business risk. With the right screening process in place, companies like ABM could have avoided years of lawsuits, public scrutiny, and financial loss.

Get in touch to learn how we can build a screening plan tailored to your organization.



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