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New Kodak diversity panel starts

■ Executive-level involvement was outside experts' suggestion.

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Eastman Kodak Co. has formed a Senior Executive Diversity and Inclusion Council that will set policy, establish diversity goals and ensure "aggressive action" toward achieving those goals, the company announced.

Daniel A. Carp, Kodak's chairman and chief executive, will lead the new eight-member council, which met for the first time Wednesday.

"This is another way to ensure that we keep focused on diversity and inclusion as a way of life at Kodak," said David Kassnoff, Kodak spokesman.

Formation of the council was recommended last year by an outside panel of experts that examined Kodak's record on providing equal employment opportunities to workers of diverse backgrounds across the globe, Kassnoff said.

The expert panel concluded that Kodak should create a work force whose profile matches the cultural makeup of the U.S. economy by the end of 2006.



Callhoun



White

Kodak also should make diversity a part of its operating culture, create mechanisms to ensure employees uphold Kodak's values and expand efforts to address challenges in education, the panel said.

The council gives Kodak's efforts to build an inclusive culture "a global reach," said Essie L. Callhoun, Kodak's chief diversity officer and a vice president.

"Our purpose is, in part, to ensure knowledge and practice of diversity and inclusion on a scale significantly greater than within the borders of our North American operations," said Callhoun, one of five permanent council members.

But Van Henri White, a Rochester lawyer who has represented several Kodak

Kodak

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employees in discrimination lawsuits, questioned the credibility of the council.

"We've seen Kodak engage in sweeping efforts before and we've seen the results — nothing happens," White said. "I'm not disparaging this, but we need to see that Kodak has changed. We really need to see it."

White also charged that Kodak announced the formation of

the council to divert attention from findings by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission involving two of his clients.

Although the commission findings have not been made public, White said they show disparate treatment of blacks in pay and promotions.

"Kodak speaks about goals, but the results are not good," White said.

Nelson Thomas, a Rochester area lawyer who represents workers in employment disputes, said the council could harm employees, especially

white employees.

"The proof will be in how policies are implemented," Thomas said. "This sounds like a group whose intent is to unlawfully favor some employees over others and to disfavor white and male employees in particular."

Kodak has problems with discrimination against African Americans, he said.

"Instead of fixing those problems on an individual basis, they have tended to do penance by making broad, sweeping changes and treating white males worse," Thomas said. "When you do that, racial problems

with minorities and females do not get resolved and innocent employees get treated worse than they should."

The council will meet quarterly. According to Kodak, it will provide direction to the company's Global Diversity Leadership Team, a group of about 30 mid-level Kodak managers who develop and implement the overall diversity strategy.

In addition to Carp and Callhoun, the permanent members of the council are: Antonio M. Perez, Kodak's president and chief operating officer; Charles S. Brown Jr., Kodak's chief ad-

ministrative officer and senior vice president; and Robert L. Berman, Kodak's director of human resources and a vice president.

Three executives will serve two-year terms: Charles C. Barrentine, director of Kodak Operating System and a vice president; Candy M. Obourn, worldwide chief operating officer of Kodak's health imaging business and a senior vice president; and Nilde Passanesi, general manager of global sites, global manufacturing and logistics and Kodak Brazil site manager. □

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