

Qualcomm to pay \$19.5M to settle gender discrimination suit

July 26 2016, by Julie Watson

Qualcomm agreed Tuesday to pay \$19.5 million to settle a gender discrimination class-action lawsuit alleging women were denied equal pay and job opportunities to their male counterparts at the tech giant.

The settlement also stipulates that the San Diego-based chip maker implement policy changes and programs to better promote female employees working in the field of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, known as STEM.

Qualcomm Technologies Inc. said in a statement that it "has strong defenses" to the claims but agreed to make improvements.

The women's lawyers say the changes could greatly affect the male-dominated industry, where women face significant barriers. The lawsuit affects a class of about 3,300 women in STEM at Qualcomm.

The company agreed to the settlement before the lawsuit was filed in federal court Tuesday. The settlement is still subject to court approval.

Women hold less than 15 percent of senior leadership positions at Qualcomm, according to the complaint. Throughout Qualcomm's U.S. operations, women in STEM and related positions earn less than their male counterparts. Managers, who are mostly male, also are in charge of deciding who gets promoted, leading to women being promoted less often than men, according to court documents.

The company also maintains an unwritten policy of rewarding employees who work late over those who arrive early and leave at the end of a normal work-day, making it difficult for women with children, according to the complaint.

The company said in a statement emailed to The Associated Press on Tuesday that it is committed to fair and equitable treatment of its employees. "While we have strong defenses to the claims, we elected to focus on continuing to make meaningful enhancements to our internal programs and processes that drive equity and a diverse and inclusive workforce which are values that we share and embrace," the company said.

As part of the settlement, Qualcomm will retain two independent consultants to make policy recommendations that will ensure an equitable workplace, and the company will appoint an internal compliance officer to oversee the implementation of the agreement's terms. Those terms include investing in leadership development initiatives, educating employees on non-discrimination policies and revamping the company's complaint procedures.

"It is common knowledge that women in STEM and other related fields face persistent discrimination in pay and promotions," said David Sanford, the lead lawyer for the plaintiffs. "This settlement represents a giant leap forward toward leveling the playing field and can serve as a model of best practices for other technology companies."

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