

Pending eviction puts 50 St. Johnsville jobs at risk

By [Bethany Bump](#) December 24, 2014

The week before Christmas, 51 employees at a St. Johnsville foam company got notice that they could soon lose their jobs.

Opflex Environmental Technologies faces eviction from its longtime home at 12 New St., a factory in the Montgomery County village, according to a notice filed last week with the state Department of Labor. The state Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act required the business give early warning to its employees, who face potential layoffs March 20.

The company makes foam products used in running shoes, ski boots, football helmets and packaging, but also in environmental catastrophes, like the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The foam absorbs contamination and oil in water, but repels the water itself.

“We think it’s inevitable we’ll be evicted,” said Mitch Stoltz, managing partner of NWS Holdings, a holding company for Indiana-based National Wine & Spirits, which also owns Opflex. “Because New York has a 90-day WARN requirement, we wanted to give employees as much notice as possible. We know it’s a bad time of year to hear it, but we also believe it’s inevitable.”

According to the property’s landlord, Jim Stallman, the property is in the midst of foreclosure.

“The foreclosure and ensuing eviction stems from the fact that Opflex Technologies has been operating out of the 12 New St. property for almost three years without paying any rent or real estate taxes,” he said in an email.

Stoltz said Stallman asked for \$50,000 a month in rent on a building that was assessed at just over \$30,000 this year. He said when he first took over the company, he had a deal with the former landlord to pay just \$1 a year in rent, so long as he paid property taxes and utility costs.

If the eviction goes through, Stoltz said he is thinking of relocating the company to Indiana. He would offer the employees jobs there, but admitted he didn’t think too many would be willing to relocate.

“We don’t think very many are going to find that doable because they’re lifelong St. Johnsville people,” he said.

Scott Smith, creator of Opflex foam technology and former head of the company when it was still called Collect Plastics, said he will do everything he can to keep the jobs in St. Johnsville.

Although he sold the company some years ago, Smith still owns the foam technology (he licenses it to Opflex) and said he remains “very sensitive about the jobs” he helped create. He was honored by the U.S. Small Business Administration in 2008 for helping keep the company afloat — with the help of county, state and federal funds, but also some of his own — after a 2006 flood caused about \$10 million worth of damage to the St. Johnsville plant.

“They are great, hardworking people who don’t deserve a notice over the holidays that their jobs are in jeopardy,” Smith said. “I’m hoping

to appeal to logic and the benefits of preserving these jobs in upstate New York. But you cannot occupy a building for free. Those are the simple facts.”