

## **Wal-Mart Under Fire Again For T-Shirts With Nazi Logo**

### **Schakowsky, Others Say Retailer Still Selling Item**

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WASHINGTON -- Rep. Jan Schakowsky went after Wal-Mart on Thursday in an effort to prod the giant retailer to make good on a 3-month-old promise to remove Nazi-themed T-shirts from its stores.

In a letter to Wal-Mart Chief Executive H. Lee Scott Jr., Schakowsky (D-Ill.) asked company officials to tell Congress what steps they are taking to remove the remaining shirts that display the Nazi Totenkopf--the "death head" emblem worn by soldiers in Adolf Hitler's personal guard--from store shelves. Twenty-one other lawmakers from both parties also signed the letter.

"Everyone agreed that these shirts have to go, including Wal-Mart; it's just that they didn't do anything about it," Schakowsky said. "Either at the time they really weren't serious, or their capacity to do that is limited, which makes one wonder about recalls of potentially dangerous products."

Blogger Rick Rottman of BentCorner.com was first to recognize the T-shirt's skull-and-crossbones design as the infamous Nazi emblem, and posted his discovery online in November. At the time, Wal-Mart responded quickly to the public outcry, promising to ban the sale of the shirts and remove them from stores.

Despite the corporate order, it appears the shirts were never removed from at least three dozen of Wal-Mart's 3,300 U.S. stores, according to Consumerist.com, which has been tracking

discoveries of the shirts.

Wal-Mart Stores Inc. spokesman David Tovar said the firm was not aware of the sordid origins of the symbol when it first stocked the shirts in the fall. "We never would have placed this T-shirt on our shelves had we known the origin and significance of this emblem," he said.

Wal-Mart said it has removed 99.5 percent of the shirts and deactivated cash register bar codes throughout its retail empire to prevent them from being scanned and sold at the register. "We're working as quickly as we can to get them off," Tovar said. "We expect to reach 100 percent completion of this task in a few days."

Yet as recently as Thursday, bloggers at Consumerist.com were fielding reports from readers who said they had successfully purchased the shirts from Wal-Marts.

"The average blue-vest employee just isn't aware of it," said Consumerist.com editor Ben Popken, who explained that when bar codes failed, readers easily persuaded employees to scan similarly priced items, or did so themselves at self-checkout counters.

Popken says he also blames unconscientious fashion designers, who likely saw the emblem of death as just another in-vogue skull-and-crossbones design, with the added bonus of being a copyright-free image. "The skull-and-crossbones is popular," he said, "but designers need to be aware of the history of the iconography that they're appropriating ad hoc."

In its efforts to remove the remaining shirts, Wal-Mart reiterated a directive to its employees to refuse to sell the shirts, and informed Schakowsky's office of its plans Thursday.

"As a Jew, and as a consumer, and as it happens, a member of Congress, I'm hoping that Wal-Mart resolves this quickly," Schakowsky said. "There's a lot of organizations and constituencies out there that will get on their case if they don't. And we'll give them a little bit of time, but not much."