

CAFTA blamed for layoffs at Edenton textile plant

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EDENTON, N.C. --More than 200 employees will lose their jobs at an Edenton manufacturing plant when the company moves most of its operations to Central America in the coming year.

Edenton Town Manager Anne-Marie Knighton said the decision by George C. Moore Co. is the result of the recently adopted Central American Free Trade Agreement.

The first 30 of the 203 employees at the plant are expected to be laid off in April, with the remainder let go by the end of 2006, according to a company news release.

The plant weaves and dyes elastic materials used by the textile industry, and has been in this city in the northeastern part of the state since the 1960s.

The Rhode Island-based company told area officials of its plans on Wednesday.

The Central American Free Trade Agreement, or CAFTA, is between Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic. It eliminates tariffs and opens up the region to U.S. goods and services.

Herb Netherton, manager at Moore's Edenton plant, confirmed Friday that the move to El Salvador was designed to fill the needs of one of the company's customers.

Netherton said his company is not completely leaving Edenton.

"We will continue to have an operation here," he said. "But it will be downsized and be much smaller than it is today."

Moore may be staying so it can fill the needs of customers who require U.S.-manufactured apparel, including the military, federal government, and some medical industries, Knighton said.

Edenton held onto its textile-producing history longer than most North Carolina counties, but the layoffs are a huge blow, she said.

"They were one of our largest employers, in certainly one of our oldest industries," Knighton said. "They came to Edenton in the early 60s and have been a good, good, corporate citizen."

The Moore announcement follows last week's decision by the Weyerhaeuser Co. to shut down its plant in nearby Plymouth after 57 years. That move is expected to displace another 200 workers.

Local agencies are developing ways to help families impacted by the layoffs.