

UPSTATE ‘SOAP’ CULT FINED FOR CHILD LABOR

By [Kenneth Lovett](#)

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ALBANY – The state yesterday fined the controversial Twelve Tribes cult \$2,000 for illegally using underage children as workers in their factories. The fines come in the wake of a Post investigation that found the cult used unpaid child laborers to churn out its soap, furniture and other products, including some that were sold in Robert Redford’s Sundance catalog. After several spot checks of the group’s various manufacturing plants, the Labor Department found two cases of child-labor abuse, both involving 15-year-old workers.

One violation was found in a Twelve Tribes-run candle manufacturing plant in Greene County; the other in a nearby furniture factory.

The two businesses were each fined a maximum \$1,000.

Labor Department spokeswoman Betsy McCormack said it’s “quite possible” that the cult could have cleaned up its act after the Post series sparked the investigation.

“We fully explained to them the labor law and the consequences for not following the labor law,” McCormack said.

“Hopefully, they will remain in compliance.”

She hinted that future spot checks of the factories are likely.

Twelve Tribes members in April admitted to pushing the envelope on child-labor laws, but argued its businesses are family-owned cottage industries where the kids help their parents – not sweatshops.

The businesses have 60 days to appeal the fine.

Cult members could not be reached for comment.

Twelve Tribes is led by Elbert Eugene Spriggs, whose racist teachings and strict child-discipline policy has brought the communal group considerable controversy.

