

## Anti-sweatshop organization looks for student support



**BY VALERIA SOSA AND KINSEY DANZIS**  
STAFF WRITERS

Exits were blocked. Fire drills ignored. Firefighters came to the rescue, but their ladders could not reach beyond the fifth floor. Helicopters could not land on the rooftop, as it had been illegally turned into a canteen. Those who tried to escape from the windows plummeted to their deaths.

An electrical short-circuit and subpar wiring ignited the ninth floor of the That's It Sportswear garment factory in Bangladesh on Dec. 14, 2010.

The catastrophe claimed the lives of 29 workers and left over a hundred more with injuries ranging from broken bones to third-degree burns.

The factory supplied popular athletic brands like The North Face, Vans and JanSport, all owned by Greensboro-based VF Corporation, the world's largest apparel company.

In response to the disaster and pressure from the public to prevent future incidents, VF signed the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, an agreement between major U.S. apparel companies to improve working conditions in Bangladesh.

"No one should have to risk their life in order to make a living," wrote Ellen Tauscher, chairman of the Alliance Board, in a semi-annual report on Jan. 30, 2014.

"It is our goal to ensure that safe workplaces in

Bangladesh become the rule, not the exception, for all women and men employed in the Bangladesh ready-made garment industry."

But, signing on to the Alliance was not good enough. "VF is signed onto the Alliance, but their factories haven't gotten any safer, so it's really kind of an empty promise," said Caiden Elmer, regional organizer for United Students Against Sweatshops a phone interview with The Guilfordian. "It doesn't actually require them to fix anything ... it's just a way to get out of signing the accord."

**"The best thing for Guilford to do would be to tell Jansport that they need to sign onto the accord..."**

**Caiden Elmer, United Students Against Sweatshops**

Garrett Strain, international campaign coordinator for USAS, said VF created the Alliance in response to massive pressure.

"The obligation to fix unpaid factories under the Alliance is clearly voluntary," said Strain in a phone interview. "And, we know from the past what VF's voluntary programs have resulted in worker death, catastrophic incidents at factories, tragedy."

Two weeks ago, a delegation from the USAS came to Guilford in hopes of starting a new chapter and spurring forward a campaign to force VF to sign the

Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh.

"When we told students, they were outraged," said Strain. "(They) have expressed interest in asking the administration to drop its contract with VF brands if they don't sign the Accord. So far, 12 universities across the country have required their brands to sign the Accord."

Hopefully, Guilford will be the thirteenth. "VF apparel is in the Guilford bookstore under a contract with JanSport," said Elmer. "The best thing for Guilford to do would be to tell Jansport that they need to sign onto the accord, or else they'll cut the contract."

Should JanSport sign the accord, the chances increase of other VF branches following suit. That has the potential to make a big difference.

"VF is a big company with a lot of factories over in Bangladesh, so if they were to sign onto the accord, that would change a lot of lives," said Deanna Nagle, a member of the USAS. "They definitely have some weight in the community."

Early College senior and activist Brent Eisenbarth said that the document is assuring human safety and ethical working conditions.

"If you have nothing to hide, there should be no problem in signing the Accord," said Eisenbarth. "Most people think that they have the right to go to work and not have the building collapse on them."

A community forum will be held on Thursday, April 17 at 6 p.m. at Genesis Baptist Church to discuss worker safety and VF's role in recent Bangladesh factory disasters.

### INSIDE SPORTS

Final Four preview



BY BOBBY PACHECO  
STAFF WRITER

Q&A with Colley & Garcia



BY ABE KENMORE  
STAFF WRITER

### STUDENT ATHLETES OF THE WEEK



**JOE MITCHELL**  
FIRST-YEAR  
TRACK & FIELD  
@ JOHNSON INVITATIONAL (MARCH 30)

Placed first in the 100-meter dash at 11.16 seconds



**JOHN MACON SMITH**  
SENIOR  
BASEBALL  
@ ROANOKE (APRIL 1)

Hit a grand slam and went 2-4 with five RBIs



**NAOMI MADARAS**  
SOPHOMORE  
TRACK & FIELD

Ran the school's third best 3000 meter run at 12:02.21