

Optus sacks 60 to cut costs

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SIXTY Optus workers have been sacked in what the ACTU called the first example of big business using the new workplace laws for sham redundancies.

But the telecommunications giant denied the redundancies had anything to do with WorkChoices, saying yesterday's sackings were a continuation of a year-long process of cost-cutting.

The 60 workers from Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane were notified by text message to attend a meeting, where they were told they were being made

redundant and invited to attend an outplacement seminar.

ACTU president Sharan Burrow said they would be told how to apply for their jobs back as independent contractors.

She said this would involve the workers, mainly field technicians, buying their own vans for \$12,000, paying their own superannuation and workers compensation insurance and picking up other overheads.

"We estimate that with all of these costs incurred, these workers will be \$200 to \$300 a week worse off," she said.

Communication Workers Union assistant state secretary Burt Blackburne said Optus

called the process "organisational change", which made it easier for the company to make people redundant. Under the new laws, companies with more than 100 workers can sack workers for "operational reasons" and be exempt from unfair dismissal claims.

But Optus spokeswoman Melissa Favero ruled out the workers coming back as independent contractors. "We're not offering them work as independent contractors, we're offering redundancies," she said.

Workers would be paid their full redundancy payment, which was above the legislated minimum, she said.