

MARGIN CALLS

Hertz offers to reinstate staff in prayer dispute

SEATTLE • Hertz rental car company, whose workers protested after 34 Muslim shuttle drivers were suspended in Seattle over prayer breaks, said it would reinstate the employees if they agreed to clock in and out.

Hertz said the Somali Muslim employees at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport were suspended not for praying, but for failing to clock in and out for 10-minute breaks as required under a collective bargaining agreement, the company said in a written statement Friday night. Washington state law allows employees two 10-minute breaks during an eight-hour shift.

"This issue arose when breaks for prayers were extended for unacceptably long periods beyond 10 minutes for non-religious activities," company spokesman Richard Broome said.

"Individual warnings were communicated as well as a written warning, both prior to the implementation of disciplinary action," he said.

Workers protested the Seattle airport Hertz location Wednesday following the suspensions, which Teamsters Local 117, the union representing the Muslim workers, has called discrimination based on religious beliefs.