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## Wal-Mart settles campaign case

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Retail giant Wal-Mart has agreed to settle a civil forfeiture action stemming from its failure to register with the Monroe city clerk before a 2005 referendum on so-called big box stores, in violation of state campaign finance law.

Wal-Mart agreed to pay the maximum fine of \$500 plus fees and assessments for a total of \$753, Dane County District Attorney Brian Blanchard said Monday.

Blanchard is handling prosecution of the case for Green County District Attorney Gary Luhman, who has a relative who works for Wal-Mart and wanted to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest.

On April 5, 2005, Monroe asked voters: "Are you in favor of the city of Monroe allowing the construction of very large retail super center stores?"

The civil forfeiture action alleged that Wal-Mart spent money on ads, a mass mailing and a public relations company to encourage "yes" votes on the referendum.

But Wal-Mart failed to register with the Monroe city clerk before its campaign, as required by state law for groups spending money to influence voters on ballot questions. That would also have triggered campaign finance requirements allowing the public to see how much money Wal-Mart was spending on the campaign.

The complaint does not allege that the violation was intentional. Blanchard said the company cooperated with investigators.

Wal-Mart's campaign was unsuccessful. Voters overwhelmingly said "no" to the question.

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