

FOXCONN CON



In a first of its kind, Apple Computer, which has been under scrutiny for the labor practices at Chinese facilities run by its Asian suppliers, allowed ABC's Nightline access to its component-maker Foxconn. Foxconn, where most of the world's iPads, iPhones, and Mac computers are produced, is one of the largest employers in mainland China. To quote Nightline host Bill Weir, "Apple computer sold 93 million iPhones last year and 40 million iPads. The only reason they didn't sell more was because they can't make them fast enough. But that relentless demand has raised uncomfortable questions as to how these precious objects are made, and how the people who make them are treated". However, what has prompted the most interest in working conditions at Foxconn of late is the suicides; Nine in all during a three month period in 2010 alone. The suicides and the subsequent publicity prompted Apple CEO Tim Cook to rush to China to evaluate the situation. Wages were raised, a counseling center was opened, and nets were placed around the dorms to stop jumpers. The Nightline visit was in conjunction with the Fair Labor Association's (FLA) audit of Foxconn facilities, which began a series of inspections at the request of Apple. A day after the Nightline special was aired; allegations have been raised that Foxconn hid underage workers from view during the FLA inspection tour. According to the organization Students & Scholars Against Corporate Misbehavior (SACOM), Foxconn reportedly "prepared for the inspection" by not assigning overtime to workers aged between 16 and 17, and even sent some off to other departments while the inspection went ahead. What has also come to light is that Foxconn apparently altered a number of its practices for the benefit of the FLA inspection. While workers are normally allowed a single break in a 12 hour shift, some received three while the audit was in process. FLA president Aurret van Heerden has said that his group is accustomed to receiving "a show" when it arrives for its audits, but that they are adept in uncovering a more accurate picture of working conditions. SACOM also cited student labor issues, alleging that that Foxconn has been able to get some schools to force students to work in the factories under the guise of "internships". While Apple's supplier code of conduct does allow for workers between 16 and 18 years of age, this is only under specific conditions that limit how long they work each day, and what kind of work they are allowed to perform. The crucial question is; How are these 16 to 18 year old employees treated once the gates to the outside world close?

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