

## NO FOLLOWERS FOR APPLE



Contrary to expectations, Apple Inc.'s decision to allow a labor group to conduct audits in its supplier factories has not been imitated by any of its rivals yet. In an unprecedented move, the iPhone maker commissioned the Fair Labor Association to commence independent audits at its plants in China following criticism of labor conditions. The FLA, a Washington-based nonprofit organization, will be inspecting plants owned by three of Apple's largest manufacturing partners. Foxconn, where some of the world's fastest-selling gadgets are assembled, has been under intense scrutiny for its working conditions. Typically, workers making Apple products work 11 hour shifts, six days a week and get no opportunity to rest due to excessively high production speeds. Employees have allegedly been exposed to dangerous aluminum dust. A rash of worker suicides in 2010 prompted Foxconn to install safety nets and hire counselors and psychologists. Foxconn also said on Feb. 18 that it was raising wages to \$290 a month, double the level of three years ago. In contrast, companies, including Microsoft Corp., Dell Inc., Hewlett-Packard Co. and Samsung Electronics Co. choose to carry out a self-evaluation of worker conditions, based on guidelines from the Electronic Industry Citizenship Coalition. While the EICC guidelines, which set standards for ethics, worker safety and labor practices, are supposedly sufficient to prevent abuses, the EICC itself does not require members to disclose findings and lacks enforcement powers. According to labor advocates, the resultant mélange of self-imposed regulations fail to hold companies accountable if and when abuses do occur. Spokeswoman for EICC, Wendy Dittmer, says she knows of no instance of a factory losing business, permanently or temporarily, for failing to live up to the group's code of conduct. Tom Fallon, chief executive officer of Infinera Corp., a Sunnyvale, California based maker of telecommunications equipment says, "They are absolutely toothless". "I don't think they do meaningful work". EICC member companies may possibly open themselves to even harsher criticism than what Apple has been subject to in the recent past. Founded in 1999, originally to address working conditions in the apparel industry, the FLAA constrains its member companies to disclose their suppliers and to submit to unannounced visits from the FLA or third-party auditors. The FLA also posts results of all audits on its website. According to CEO Auret van Heerden, no other technology company to date, apart from Apple, has sought membership in the FLA.

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