

Inspections at Apple's Suppliers in China

This is the VOA Special English Technology Report.

A labor group has begun investigating working conditions at the Chinese factories where many Apple products are made. Apple officials ordered the investigation after the New York Times newspaper described poor working conditions at the factories.

The Foxconn Technology Group owns the manufacturing centers in Shenzhen, Chengdu and Zhengzhou.

Angela Cornell is a professor at the Cornell Law School in Ithaca, New York. She says many issues were raised last year after a number of suicides at the Foxconn factories.

AP
A Foxconn factory in China

One issue is the number of hours that employees are required to work. Other concerns are pay, living conditions and even reports of violence against workers.

The New York Times reported that employees sometimes worked seven days a week. The newspaper said some stood so long that they had trouble walking. Widespread criticism of Apple followed publication of the report. Mark Shields organized a campaign calling for better working conditions.



MARK SHIELDS: "Workers lives are really hard and really severe, and there's terrible stories about people losing the use of their hands because of horrible repetitive motion injuries, and suicide rates that are so high that they have got to hang nets off the sides of the buildings to prevent workers from killing themselves."

Professor Cornell says the conditions at the Foxconn factories had to have been really bad.

ANGELA CORNELL: "Just imagine how dire the working conditions would have had to be for those workers to sacrifice their lives."

Professor Cornell says even Apple's own reports noted issues at some of its factories. These included involuntary labor and underage labor.

ANGELA CORNELL: "These are important issues. The involuntary laborer(s) are indentured migrant workers. And that is a crucially important issue. I mean that's basically slave labor." More than two hundred thousand people have joined Mark Shields' campaign for better working conditions. The American admits he loves his Apple products. But, he says, he wants them to be made without human suffering.

The company announced last week it had asked the Fair Labor Association to investigate the conditions at its Foxconn factories. The FLA was established in nineteen ninety-nine to investigate working conditions around the world. Apple joined the not-for-profit group earlier this year.

Last Friday, the Times reported that the president of the FLA has begun praising the factories. But the group's second-in-command suggested delaying judgment until a report on the investigation is finished.

Also on Friday, Foxconn said it was raising the pay of its workers in China. It was the company's third pay raise since twenty-ten.

And that's the VOA Special English Technology Report, written by June Simms. I'm Steve Ember.