



Telegraph UK: Apple admits child labour used at its assembly plants

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Technology multinational Apple has admitted that child labour was used at the factories that build its computers, iPods and mobile phones.

At least 11 15-year-old children were discovered to be working last year in three factories which supply Apple.

The company did not name the offending factories, or say where they were based, but the majority of its goods are assembled in China.

Apple also has factories working for it in Taiwan, Singapore, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, the Czech Republic and the US.

Apple said the child workers are now no longer being used, or are no longer under-age. "In each of the three facilities, we required a review of all employment records for the year as well as a complete analysis of the hiring process to clarify how under-age people had been able to gain employment," Apple said, in an annual report on its suppliers.

Apple has been repeatedly criticised for using factories that abuse workers and where conditions are poor. Last week, it emerged that 62 workers at a factory that manufactures products for Apple and Nokia had been poisoned by n-hexane, a toxic chemical that can cause muscular degeneration and blur eyesight.

Apple has not commented on the problems at the plant, which is run by Wintek, in the Chinese city of Suzhou.

A spokesman for Wintek said that "almost all" of the affected workers were back at work, but that some remained in hospital. Wintek said n-hexane was commonly used in the technology industry, and that problems had arisen because some areas of the factory were not ventilated properly.

Last year, an employee at Foxconn, the Taiwanese company that is one of Apple's biggest suppliers, committed suicide after being accused of stealing a prototype for the iPhone.

Sun Danyong, 25, was a university graduate working in the logistics department when the prototype went missing. An investigation revealed the factory's security staff had beaten him, and he subsequently jumped to his death from the 12th floor of his apartment building.

Foxconn runs a number of super-factories in the south of China, some of which employ as many as 300,000 workers and form self-contained cities, complete with banks, post offices and basketball courts.

China Labor Watch, a New York-based NGO, accused Foxconn of having an "inhumane and militant" management, which neglects basic human rights. Foxconn's management was not available for comment.

In its report, Apple revealed the sweatshop conditions inside the factories it uses. Apple admitted that at least 55 of the 102 factories were ignoring Apple's rule that staff cannot work more than 60 hours a week.

The technology company's own guidelines are already in breach of China's widely-ignored labour law, which sets out a maximum 49-hour week for workers.

Apple also said that one of its factories had repeatedly falsified its records in order to conceal the fact that it was using child labour and working its staff endlessly.

"When we investigated, we uncovered records and conducted worker interviews that revealed excessive working hours and seven days of continuous work," Apple said, adding that it had terminated all contracts with the factory.

Only 65pc of the factories were paying their staff the correct wages and benefits, and Apple found 24 factories where workers had not even been paid China's minimum wage of around 800 yuan (£76) a month.

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