Apple Labor Fixes In China Said Ahead Of Schedule

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The labor group hired by Apple Inc. to assess working conditions at three manufacturing plants in China said Tuesday that the improvements it recommended in March are being implemented ahead of schedule.

The Fair Labor Association said in a progress report that Apple Inc.'s largest supplier, Foxconn, had made all 195 improvements to working conditions that were due by the end of May. Foxconn also completed 89 of the 165 improvements due by next July.

The review of working conditions follows a rash of suicides at Foxconn facilities — about a dozen since 2010 — and an explosion at the iPad-making plant in Chengdu in May 2011 that killed four workers. The explosion was caused by the build-up of aluminum dust, and the FLA said in March that Foxconn had already improved operating procedures to reduce the risk of a recurrence.

Among the changes enacted since then, the FLA said that Foxconn had reduced work hours to 60 hours per week.

That's significant because about 25 percent of the 38,000 workers at the Chengdu facility had exceeded the cap in June 2011, it said.

That compared to about 7 percent at the 56,000-worker Guanlan facility from October to December last year and 8 percent at the 57,000-strong Longhua facility from last November through January, it said.

Apple has set a goal of capping work hours at 49 hours per week, including overtime, to comply with Chinese law by July 2013. Reaching that goal would require hiring and housing more workers to maintain the current level of productivity, the FLA said.

"Some of the most challenging action items —such as compliance with Chinese labor law regarding hours of work — are yet to come, and FLA will continue to engage with Apple and Foxconn to monitor and verify progress," it said.

Apple said in July that the percentage of the 700,000 workers across its entire supply chain who worked more than 60 hours per week fell to 3 percent from 11 percent in March.

Apple spokesman Steve Dowling said in a statement that the company is "proud of the progress we are making together."

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