

Undercover Reporter Reveals Conditions at Foxconn iPhone Factory

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A Chinese undercover reporter has documented his experiences working at Foxconn's Tai Yuan factory, presumably the production line of the 'iPhone 5'.

The journalist, working for the Shanghai Evening Post, reportedly worked as an iPhone assembler for ten days.

A day before the rumored iPhone 5 is due to launch, the publication has released a report detailing the experience at Foxconn's Tai Yuan factory. The Post reporter secured a job at the plant, and documented his experience, which has been translated by MIC Gadget.

Potentially reopening the controversy around Apple partner Foxconn's Chinese factories, the reporter was put through an intensive 7-day orientation, in which he was shown the living quarters, where he would eat, and how to assemble his assigned portion of the new phone model.

According to the Post, he worked a night shift, including a midnight to 6 a.m. stint with no breaks. The reporter's job was to mark four parts of the smartphone's backplate with an oil-based pen. According to the report, the aim was to get through as many components as quickly as possible, and dozens of other staff members were assigned the same role.

The dormitory where workers slept was described as "a nightmare". The dorm was allegedly a mix of garbage, sweat and foam -- and when the reporter opened his wardrobe, "lots of cockroaches crawl out from inside and the bedsheets that are being distributed to every new workers are full of dirt and ashes."

Before being allowed near the production line, the reporter's contract signing is documented below:

The contract has highly emphasized on 4 confidential areas that need to be kept strictly confidential, 1: All technical information, 2: Sales figures, 3: Human resource, 4: Production statistics. The contract didn't mention much on the overtime works. Under the section of "Possible harmful effects that may cause to worker during production", the management has asked us to tick "No" for all of them. This includes "Noise pollution" and "Toxic Pollution", I was wondering if the production floor will caused any harmful effects while working.

Unsurprisingly, security is a top concern of the plant. At the entrance of the production floor, if anyone carried a metal item through the metal detector door it was an immediately fireable offence. One worker was apparently fired for carrying a USB cable.

Once inside, the supervisor told the reporter "Once you sit down, you only do what you are told." The reporter noted the loud sounds of machine engines and a "dense plastic smell", before being presented the back of the new iPhone and told "This is the new unleashed iPhone 5 back plate, you should be honored having the chance to produce it."

The reporter then writes:

By my own calculations, I have to mark five iPhone plates every minute, at least. For every 10 hours, I have to accomplish 3,000 iPhone 5 back plates. There are total 4 production lines in charge of this process, 12 workers in every line. Each line can produce 36,000 iPhone 5 back plates in half a day, this is scary.. I finally stopped working at 7 a.m.

No doubt the report has been arranged to coincide with Apple's announcement, and as Chinese media outlets have exaggerated these kinds of stories before, it's worth taking with a pinch of salt. However, considering Foxconn's history with dubious working conditions, there may be a grain of truth to the reporter's experience.

Earlier this year, Apple CEO Tim Cook said that the Cupertino-based firm is committed to improving working conditions at Chinese partner factories.