pose danger to safety & health profession

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he integrity of the occupational health and safety profession is under threat as it is being
drawn in to “certifying” that sweatshop facto-
ries in global supply chains in the developing world
are safe and meet international standards for protect-
ing workers on the job. These certifications are a
sham and threaten to paint all OHS professionals as
complicit in a corrupt charade.

In January 2012, following a series of devastating
articles in the New York Times about abusive and dan-
gerous conditions in its supply chain, Apple joined
the corporate-funded Fair Labor Association (FLA). Apple
commissioned the FLA to conduct audits of
three of the Chinese factories operated by its principal
supplier, Taiwan-based Foxconn.

In March 2012, the FLA released its audit report of
the three factories, confirming what grassroot non-
governmental organizations had been saying for years:
Apple’s supplier factories are unsafe, unhealthy, and
had engaged in numerous illegal practices, includ-
ing excessive worker overtime, wage theft, violations
of local Internet and physical harassment of the young
migrant workers who live in massive dormitories inside
Foxconn compounds. (See box for links to reports.)

One startling revelation in the FLA report was
that two of the three audited factories – Fox Tai Hua
Industrial Co. Ltd.’s plants in Guanjian and Longhua,
China – are “OHSAS 18001 certified” despite having
no functioning health and safety programs whatever.
The certification was reportedly awarded by the
Swiss-based NGOs Société Générale de Surveillance,”
which has U.S. offices in New Jersey.

Phantom program

The business-friendly FLA reported that “although there
is an OHS [health, safety and environment] commit-
tee in place, this committee is not active. There are
no periodic meetings or internal audits conducted by
this committee. There is no worker participation and
integration on ongoing HSE efforts, as there are no
elected worker representatives on the HSE committee.
No system for keeping track of sickness and working
days lost to sickness. Risk analysis report does not
cover all the hazards and risks in the factory.”

The audit report listed the plants’ OHS program
deficiencies in great detail, including:

- “No Lock-out/Tag out (LOTO) procedure for
  protecting workers.”
- “No procedure for controlling working condi-
tions and protecting workers from potential risk of
  falling when they work at heights.”
- “List of machines that need guarding is missing.”
- “No procedure for controlling thermal comfort
  conditions of the workers [in tropical southern China].”
- “Incomplete Material Safety Data Sheets
  (MSDS) of chemical substances used.”
- “Inadequate and/or improper personal protective
equipment (gloves, hearing protection, shoes), includ-
ing the use of “carbonized paper masks” by work-
ers handling solvents and other chemicals.”
- “Inadequate emergency plans and non-code-compli-
ant exits, fire protection systems, and lack of fire drills;”
- “No ergonomics program – evaluation, controls,
  training – for highly repetitive assembly work
  performed 11 to 16 hours per day, with large
  numbers of workers with little rest intervals.”
- Inadequate number of toilets (20-24 toilets in
  assembly areas with 1,500-2,000 workers) below
  legal requirements.

Issues not examined

Despite the plants’ OHSAS 18001 certification, the
FLA report noted “most managerial staff interviewed
mentioned that these issues have never been raised
during external OHSAS 18001 audits.”

The FLA report also noted that there is “no active
worker representation and participation on HSE com-
mitee” and “no active system for encouraging work-
ers to participate.” The FLA found that “management
is not aware of possible legal and financial conse-
quences of work accidents and occupational diseases
that may happen within the factory.”

These Foxconns/Apple plants, certified under the
OHSAS 18001 system as having effective workplace
health and safety management systems, in fact, have
OHS programs in name only, and what’s on paper
never reaches the factory floor.

Yet, like scores of other supplier factories in
global supply chains, Foxconn’s factories have been
certified by SGS and dozens of other for-
profit firms ever anxious to keep their factory
operator customers happy. The certifications also
supply international retail brands with a ready
response to the numerous and ongoing reports, in
the news media and by grassroot worker rights
organizations, documenting that their supply
chains are full of unsafe and illegal sweatshops.

FLA, Apple Reports on Working Conditions at Apple Suppliers

  fairlaborassociation.org/certification/foxconn-investigation-report
  http://www.fairlaborassociation.org/certification/foxconn-revolution-verification

Non-Governmental Organization Reports on Working Conditions at Apple

- Students & Scholars Against Corporate Misbehavior (SACOM), "Sweatshops are good
- "Economic Policy Institute and Workers Rights Initiative, "Making the Apple Fair Labor
  Association Give Foxconn and Apple undefer for credit for labor rights progress," November 8, 2012 —
- "Economic Policy Institute and Workers Rights Initiative, "Apple’s self-reporting on sup-
  pliers’ labor practices shows serious regime problems: mixed results on labor and human
  publication/evaluate-reporting-suppliers-labor-practices/
- SACOM, "Apple falls to its responsibility to monitor suppliers," February 26, 2013 —

Stand up to the sham

Unless the OHS profession – through its
associations, its journals, and its conferences
clamors and rejects this “gaming the sys-
tem” by for-profit and non-profit consultants
who “certify” safe conditions, when they do
not exist, to meet the public-relations needs
of transnational corporations, it will rightly be
seen as complicit in a deadly sham.

For example, Social Accountability International (SAI) developed its own corpo-
rate social responsibility code – “SA 8000” — which includes OHS measures similar to
OHSAS 18001. SAI makes its money training employees of other companies to certify their clients’ plants as “com-
pliant with SA 8000,” and has made millions of dollars over the past decades producing SA 8000 auditors who
work for consulting companies worldwide.

In August 2012, the Indian firm RINA Group, using
their SAI-trained auditors, gave the All Enterprises
plant in Karachi, Pakistan, a clean bill of health and a
SA 8000 certification. Three weeks later, 258 work-
er were killed in a fire where workers were trapped
behind locked doors and barred windows after dam-
aged electrical systems ignited improperly stored flamm-
able materials in the “SA 8000-certified” factory.

The All Enterprise factory, producing garments for
German retailer KIK, also had been inspected by UL
Responsible Sourcing three times between 2007 and
2011. In December 2011, UL Responsible Sourcing
reported the factory was in compliance with all
national laws and the KIK corporate code of conduct,
including on health and safety issues.

Hiding dangerous conditions

Certifications by SGS, SAI or UL Responsible
Sourcing are one way that irresponsible factory opera-
tors like Foxconn and Apple Enterprises are able to hide
these dangerous conditions that kill and maim, and also
provide their international brand retailers like Apple and
KIK with “plausible deniability” when consumers and
human rights advocates demand that workers should not
have to die making blue jeans or iPhones.

Unfortunately, while workplace health and safety issues
were prominently featured in the March 2012 FLA report
on Foxconn’s three facilities, these issues have virtually
disappeared from both FLA and Apple’s follow-up reports.

The role of OHS professionals is to ensure effective OHS programs,
not only on paper but also on the factory floor.

In the FLA August 2012 “Verification Report” on
Foxconn’s Guanlan factory, for example, only 14 of
the 26 specific H&S recommendations made in the
March 2012 report were addressed at all, and the
“verifications” only partially touch on the recommen-
dations, and the report contained no details on how even
theese 14 recommendations were “completed.”

Apple’s February 2013 “Supplier Responsibility”
report has no information on health and safety at
Foxconn plants or any supplier factory. In the seven
short paragraphs on the health and safety report,
Apple notes the number of “factory assessments”
done in 2012 (40), and the number of trainings done
with Apple employees and supplier plant managers –
but no information on what, if anything, has changed
in the hundreds of Apple’s supplier factories.

A matter of credibility & reputation

The role of OHS professionals is to ensure effective
OHS programs, not only on paper but also on the facto-
ry floor. Effective programs cannot be implemented
without active participation by informed and knowledge-
able workers. The OHSMS certification programs at the
Foxconn plants and, no doubt, many others, are a threat to
achieving those goals, and also threaten the integrity and
reputation of the OHS profession itself.

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