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Global Times: Apple admits child labor at three factories

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By Tu Lei

Apple has admitted that child labor was used in some factories that produced the company's computers, iPods and iPhones.

Although the company did not detail the names of the factories, nor disclose in which countries the factories were based, the majority of its products are assembled in China.

In the 24-page-report, named Supplier Responsibility 2010 Progress Report released Wednesday, the company said three facilities had previously hired 15-year-old workers in countries where the minimum age for employment is 16.

"Across the three facilities, our auditors found records of 11 workers who had been hired prior to reaching the legal age, although the workers were no longer underage or no longer in active employment at the time of our audit," said the annual report.

Moreover, Apple admitted that at least 55 of the 102 factories that produce its goods were ignoring Apple's rule that staff cannot work more than 60 hours a week. The Labor Law in China sets out a maximum 44-hour week for workers.

As the supplier names and locations are not disclosed in the report, it is impossible for NGOs and workers to monitor the accuracy of the report, Debby Chan, a project officer from Student and Scholars Against Corporate Misbehaviour, a Hong Kong-based NGO, told the Global Times Sunday.

"As such, the CSR report of Apple cannot make readers well informed about the real labor rights violations in their suppliers," Chan said.

In fact, it is not the first time a company has been criticized for using factories that abuse workers and where conditions are poor.

In January, the sportswear giant Nike released Corporate Social Responsibility reports for the 2007-2009 fiscal years indicating overtime in its factories was increasing.

In 2007, there were 110 factories that saw workers put in between 60-72 hours per week, and 27 factories that exceeded 72 hours.

Factories where workers put in overtime accounted for 20 percent of Nike's total in 2007, and increased to 24 percent in 2009. China has 136 Nike factories.

In July 2009, China Labor Watch, a New York-based NGO, published a report on Wal-Mart's Chinese supply chain, saying some workers make only \$0.51 per hour, 60 percent of the minimum wage. And during the busy season, the workday is 11 hours, or 77 hours per week, and overtime is mandatory.

The CSR reports show the world takes a close look at made-in-China products, said Li Xiaogang, director of the foreign investment research center of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

China Labor Watch | 147 W 35 St, Ste 406, NYC, NY 10001
+1-212-244-4049 | clw@chinalaborwatch.org
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