



Home

About Us

Our Work

Reports

Media Center

Get Involved

Resources

Industry

Brand

Year

Home>Reports

- 2011
- 2010
- 2009
- 2008
- 2007
- 2006
- 2005
- 2004
- 2003
- 2002
- 2001
- 2000

Xin Qiao Electronics

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The report below is based on Li Qiang's experiences working at this factory in 1999 and 2000, when 400 people went on strike to protest the factory's working conditions.

Profile

Location: Shengzhen (Shajing Township, Bao'an district)

Employees: 3,500

Sex ratio: 1 (male) to 3 (female)

A subsidiary of Practical Group, Inc. (30,000)

This is a contractor with the American company Farberware. Its product, Farberware can opener, is sold at \$20 on average in many American stores. Workers are paid \$0.30 for each of them.

Introduction

- › In peak production seasons workers are required to stay 16.5 hours a day in the factory, working 14 hours (all standing), seven days a week and 30 days a month. Normally workers work over 375 hours a month. No more than 10 days off a whole year including all holidays.
- › Hourly wage 1.22 RMB (15 cents). Forced overtime. Some new workers having done 4 hours overtime while paid only 2 hours. Overtime hourly wage 1.65 RMB (20 cents).
- › Heavy workload. Assignment could not be finished within 12.5 normal working hours.
- › Very harsh factory regulations. Violations are met by fines or firing.
- › A very small dormitory houses 16 workers. Room and board deducted from wages. No bathroom and toilets.
- › Employment requires a 60 RMB fees. Workers are paid their first month's wages after being employed 75 days. No work contract.
- › No medical, retirement and unemployment insurance. Workers are fired if ill.
- › Workers are often abused and humiliated at the worksite.
- › Generally only female workers of ages 18-25 are hired.

A factory Improvement Committee is responsible only for better quality and more output, unconcerned with workers welfare. No union.

Work Hours

Under normal conditions, workers stay inside the factory for around 15.5 hours.

- 7:30-12:00 Working
- 12:00-13:30 Lunch break
- 13:30- 17:30 Working
- 17:30-18:30 Supper break
- 18:30-22:30 Forced Overtime
- 22:30-23:00 Cleaning and finishing

Workers work seven days a week. Each week's total time at the worksite amounts to an average of 105 hours, and working time 87.5 hours.

In the peak season workers stay in the factory for an average of 16.5 hours per day.

7:30-12:00 Working

12:00-13:30 Lunch break

13:30- 17:30 Working

17:30-18:30 Supper break

18:30-24:00 Forced Overtime (sometimes working 24 hours)

Workers work 7 days a week. Each week's total time at the worksite amounts to an average of 111.5 hours, and working time 98 hours (standing).

Normally workers work 30 days, over 375 hours a month. No more than 10 days off a whole year including all holidays.

Wages

Hourly wage is 1.22 RMB (about 15 cents).

Normal day shift from 7:30 to 17:30, 8.5 working hours of which are paid 11.5 RMB (\$1.41)

Overtime from 18:30 to 22:30 is paid 1.65 RMB an hour (20 cents), 6.6 RMB (80 cents) for 4 hours.

So the workers are paid

\$2.25 a day (12.5 hours);

\$15.47 a week (87.5 hours);

\$67.50a month (375 hours)

\$810 a year

However, for workers who have less than three months' experience, only two of their four hours of overtime is paid. About 20 percent of workers belong to this category (since many workers quit while losing their deposit because of the inhuman conditions). They are paid at

\$1.75 a day (12.5 hours);

\$12.50 a week (87.5 hours);

\$52.50 a month (375 hours)

Workload

Heavy workload. Daily assignment could be finished within 12.5 hours and the factory doesn't pay the workers beyond 12.5 hours.

For example, a Farberware can opener production line is composed of 23 workers with a daily assignment of 1400 pieces. If the workers in the line fail to produce 1400 pieces by 22:30, they are forced to go on working, as voluntary work, in the term used by management. If they finish the assignment before 22:30, they have to continue until 22:30. In both cases, there is no additional overtime pay.

Harsh Factory Rules

A major offense results in a fine of 100 RMB (\$12); a minor one 50 RMB (\$6); a warning 10 RMB (\$1.20).

For example, even if one minute late, a worker would be fined 50 RMB, which is more than her whole day's wage; if not respectful of the superiors, such as talking back, a warning; if taking a day off without permission from superiors, a major offense; if refusing to work overtime, a major offense; refusing to work overtime three times leads to firing.

Room and Board

A very small dormitory houses 16 workers. Workers are sleeping in bunkers. There is one bathroom for all of them.

Room and board deducted from wages. The room cost 40 RMB (\$5) per month. A meal, provided by the factory, costs 3-5 RMB. Some workers only eat two meals to save money.

Sometimes because of deductions and heavy fines, workers could owe money to the factory after a month.

Sign-up and Quitting

When workers sign up for the job, they are required 60 RMB fees: 45 RMB for uniform, 5 RMB for factory ID, 10RMB for room registration.

Workers receive their first month's pay after working 75 days. In essence, the factory withholds one-and-a-half months of workers' wages as deposit.

Workers don't have a contract and cannot quit the job. The only way out is to leave on their own, in which case they lose two-and-a-half months wages (deposit plus the last month wages). In the peak season, the workload is too heavy and many workers would like to leave. However, the loss of money prevents them to do so.

Welfare

The workers don't have any insurance.

If a worker is ill, he or she will be fired by the factory beyond 3-day sick leave.

Humiliation and Abuses

Workers are often humiliated and abused at work. For example, if a worker slows down the product line, the line leader will harshly scold him or her or even impose other punishments.

Workers can only go to the bathroom with permission from their supervisor. A female worker would cry when not given the permission to go to the bathroom.

Gender Issue

In general the factory intends to hire only female workers aged 18 to 25. Female workers beyond 25 are considered physically unfit for the tough working conditions. Xin Qiao's workload is forbidding for many female workers. As a result the factory recruited many male workers.

Organizing

No union. If some workers raise demands about improving working and living conditions, they will be fired immediately and forfeited their deposit and last month wages.

In December 1999, some workers were planning a strike, with the only demand of no overtime from 6:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. on Sunday. More than 1,000 workers got involved very soon. The representatives of the workers went to the management and then the municipal labor bureau, but to no avail. The factory fired them immediately and threatened to turn them to police.

An Improvement Committee was set up in January 1999. However, it is controlled by the management and only concerned with better quality and more output. Its setup actually works against workers' interests. For example, before January 1999, workers could be seated while working. The committee recommended as a measure to increase output that workers work in a standing position. Many females were reduced to tears when this requirement was first put into practice in February 1999.

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