

Foxconn worker dies in China; 10th in a year(3)

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A Chinese employee of Foxconn Technology Group jumped from a building to his death, state-run media said, in the 10th suicide this year at the world's largest contract maker of electronics, such as the iPod, Dell computers and Nokia phones.

Police said Li Hai, 19, killed himself Tuesday after working at the plant for only 42 days, the official Xinhua News Agency reported. Foxconn did not immediately comment on the death.

The suicide is the ninth at Foxconn's massive plant in the southern city of Shenzhen, which employs more than 300,000 people. Two other workers have tried to kill themselves by jumping from buildings in Shenzhen but they survived. Another suicide occurred at a smaller plant in northern Hebei province in January.

Labor activists say the string of suicides back up their long-standing allegations that workers toil in terrible conditions at Foxconn. They claim shifts are long, the assembly line moves too fast and managers enforce military-style discipline on the work force.

In Hong Kong on Tuesday, about a dozen labor activists protested at Foxconn offices in the Chinese territory. They held signs that said, "Foxconn lacks a conscience" and "Suicide is no accident." The protesters from the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions burned cardboard cutouts resembling iPhones.

But Foxconn has insisted that workers are treated well and are protected by social responsibility programs that ensure their welfare. The Shenzhen factory is perennially a popular place to work, with hordes of applicants lining up for jobs during the hiring season.

On Monday, Foxconn Chairman Terry Gou told reporters, "We are certainly not running a sweatshop. We are confident we'll be able to stabilize the situation soon."

Gou was scheduled to speak to reporters again Wednesday at Foxconn's plant in Shenzhen.

Foxconn is a major manufacturer for Apple Inc., and the American company told The Associated Press that it has talked to Foxconn's senior management about the suicides and believes the firm is taking the matter seriously.

"We are saddened and upset by the recent suicides at Foxconn," Apple spokesman Steve Dowling said. "Apple is deeply committed to ensuring that conditions throughout our supply chain are safe and workers are treated with respect and dignity."

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"A team from Apple is independently evaluating the steps they are taking to address these tragic events, and we will continue our ongoing inspections of the facilities where our products are made," he added.

Dell Inc. also said it was also looking into Foxconn's situation.

"Any reports of poor working conditions in Dell's supply chain are investigated and, if warranted, appropriate action is taken," Dell spokesman Jess Blackburn told the AP via e-mail.

"We expect our suppliers to employ the same high standards we do in our own facilities," Blackburn said.

Nokia Corp. spokeswoman Louise Ingram declined to comment on specific suicide cases. But she said: "Nokia firmly believes that all employees have the right to ethical and legal treatment. We set strict requirements to all our suppliers, including Foxconn, and follow up on them regularly."

Tuesday's reported death came just three days after a 21-year-old man who worked in the logistics department jumped from a four-story building shortly after finishing the night shift Friday. His motivations were still not known.

The highest-profile Foxconn death happened last July when Sun Danyong, 25, jumped to his death after being interrogated over a missing iPhone prototype.

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