

Foxconn opens plant to reporters after suicides

May 26 2010, By WILLIAM FOREMAN , Associated Press Writer



In this photo taken on Feb 24, 2010, a recruiter from Foxconn talks to job applicants outside the factory in Shenzhen in southern China's Guangdong province. A Chinese employee of Foxconn Technology Group fell from a building and died Tuesday, May 25, 2010, state-run media said, in the 10th such death this year at the world's largest contract maker of electronics, such as the iPod, Dell computers and Nokia phones. (AP Photo)

(AP) -- The head of the giant electronics company whose main facility in China has been battered by a string of worker suicides opened the plant's gates to scores of reporters Wednesday, hours after saying that intense media attention could make the situation worse.

Foxconn Technology Group Chairman Terry Gou led the media tour at the sprawling Foxconn complex in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen - an unprecedented move from the normally super-secretive

Taiwanese company still struggling to come to terms with the suicides of 10 young workers this year.

On Tuesday Li Hai, 19, became the latest victim of the suicide surge, jumping to his death from a building at the world's largest contract maker of electronics, which counts among its products Apple iPods, Dell computers and Nokia phones.

Police said Li killed himself after working at the plant for only 42 days, the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

The suicide is the ninth at Foxconn's massive plant in 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.

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

Speaking to reporters early Wednesday in Taipei, Gou said continuing media interest in the suicides could make a bad situation even worse.

"The media's continuing reports will help generate a suicide cluster among these young people who have just entered the job market," Gou said.

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.

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.

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."

"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 said.

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. "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," she said.

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.

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