Apple under fire from Chinese environmental groups

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(AP) -- Chinese environmental groups accused Apple Inc. on Thursday of ignoring their concerns about health and safety problems at factories that supply it with components.

A report by the three dozen groups, "The Other Side of Apple," ranks Apple as the least responsive to concerns among more than two dozen technology companies that were surveyed.

The criticism comes as the maker of hit gadgets like the iPod and iPad begins to open stores in China and push further into the Chinese market. The Cupertino, Calif.-based company this week said revenue from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan totaled $2.6 billion, about 10 percent of its total revenue and four times the year-ago total.

Chinese environmental groups have been critical of Apple in the past, but the latest report underscores their growing outspokenness in a society where dissent is routinely suppressed by the authorities. Though dubbed environmentalists, their activism extends into other areas including worker rights.

Apple has been trailed by bad publicity after several workers for one of its suppliers, contractor Foxconn Technology Group which makes iPhones and other gadgets, killed themselves in southern China last year.

Dozens of workers for another contractor, Wintek Corp., have reported being sickened by chemicals used in making touch screens for Apple and

other companies.

Low wages have drawn thousands of foreign companies to China, with many contracting production to Chinese companies or the local units of other foreign companies to boost profits. But activists say that makes it more of a challenge to track problems like dangerous working conditions and hold the company that contracted out the production liable.

An Apple spokeswoman in China, Carolyn Wu, said the company is "committed to ensuring the highest standards of social responsibility" but had no direct response to Thursday's report.

The report says Apple didn't respond to repeated requests for information on problems at its suppliers that have made news over the past year.

"If the supplier doesn't perform, does Apple really have responsibility? Yes," the report said.

The report, in Chinese, was posted Thursday on the website of the Beijing-based Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs.

It ranks 29 multinational companies on how they responded to questions and concerns about health and safety among their suppliers.

Ranked as being the most responsive were British Telecommunications, Compaq Computer and Samsung Electronics Co.

The report says Apple failed in particular in responding to questions about the sickening of dozens of workers at the Wintek Corp. factory in eastern China.

Wintek acknowledged the incident. But the report says Apple would not

say whether Wintek was a supplier in that case.

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