# What’s the negative impact of iPhone factories on nearby society?

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### Life and death in Apple’s forbidden city

\the Guardian \ this is an edited extract from The One Device: The Secret History of the iPhone by [Brian Merchant](https://twitter.com/bcmerchant), published by Bantam Press. \

“It’s not a good place for human beings,” says one of the young men, who goes by the name Xu. He’d worked in Longhua for about a year, until a couple of months ago, and he says the conditions inside are as bad as ever. “There is no improvement since the media coverage,” Xu says. The work is very high pressure and he and his colleagues regularly logged 12-hour shifts. Management is both aggressive and duplicitous, publicly scolding workers for being too slow and making them promises they don’t keep, he says. His friend, who worked at the factory for two years and chooses to stay anonymous, says he was promised double pay for overtime hours but got only regular pay. **They paint a bleak picture of a high-pressure working environment where exploitation is routine and where depression and suicide have become normalised.**

“It wouldn’t be Foxconn without people dying,” Xu says. “Every year people kill themselves. They take it as a normal thing.”

Over several visits to different iPhone assembly factories in Shenzhen and Shanghai, we interviewed dozens of workers like these. Let’s be honest: to get a truly representative sample of life at an iPhone factory would require a massive canvassing effort and the systematic and clandestine interviewing of thousands of employees. So take this for what it is: efforts to talk to often skittish, often **wary and often bored workers** who were coming out of the factory gates, taking a lunch break or congregating after their shifts.

### Dying for an iPhone: the lives of Chinese workers

[Jenny Chan](https://www.chinadialogue.net/authors/2388-Jenny-Chan)\[Ngai Pun](https://www.chinadialogue.net/authors/2391-Ngai-Pun)\[Mark Selden](https://www.chinadialogue.net/authors/2394-Mark-Selden)\15.04.2016

https://www.chinadialogue.net/article/show/single/en/8826-Dying-for-an-iPhone-the-lives-of-Chinese-workers

Apple’s new ultra-thin iPhones scratch so easily that they must be held in protective cases during assembly. This makes workers’ delicate operations even more difficult, but no extra time is given to complete the work. A worker explained, “The precision requirement for the screens of the iPhone cannot be detected by human eyes. We use microscopes to check product appearance. It’s impossibly strict.” **These new standards are causing workers painful eye strain and headaches.**

However, when it comes to workers' conditions, little appears to have changed. Workers we interviewed reported other **major health concerns**. At Foxconn Kunshan’s factory near Shanghai one worker said, “**Prolonged direct contact with nickel in metal alloys and electroplating materials affects human skin.** If I already have a rash, it will itch even more.” At Foxconn Chengdu’s “iPad city” workers operated polishing machines that produce clouds of microscopic aluminium dust 12 hours a day. **“I’m breathing aluminium dust at Foxconn like a vacuum cleaner,”** said one worker. With the workshop windows tightly shut, workers felt as if they were “suffocating.”

### Why Apple was bad for the environment (and why that's changing)

By [David Price](https://www.macworld.co.uk/author/david-price/), Macworld UK's Editor, responsible for all things iOS.

https://www.macworld.co.uk/feature/apple/complete-guide-apples-environmental-impact-green-policies-3450263/

Greenpeace's biggest issue with Apple was its reliance on coal to power its servers, along with its high (and increasing) estimated electricity consumption. As the [Guardian](http://go.redirectingat.com/?id=803X112722&xcust=41-3450263-11-0000000&sref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Emacworld%2Eco%2Euk%2Ffeature%2Fapple%2Fcomplete%2Dguide%2Dapples%2Denvironmental%2Dimpact%2Dgreen%2Dpolicies%2D3450263%2F&xs=1&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Eguardian%2Eco%2Euk%2Fenvironment%2F2011%2Fapr%2F21%2Fapple%2Dleast%2Dgreen%2Dtech%2Dcompany) explained at the time: "The report estimated dependence on coal for Apple's data centres at 54.5%, followed by Facebook at 53.2%, IBM at 51.6%, HP at 49.4%, and Twitter at 42.5%."

Other problems that Greenpeace has had with **Apple in the past have included toxic components within the iPhone and other products,** "withholding its full list of regulated substances" and poor policies relating to product take-back and recycling.

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### An industry revived

5 ways the iPhone changed our lives

By Heather Kelly, CNN

Updated 1559 GMT (2359 HKT) June 30, 2012

The iPhone may have helped kill the BlackBerry, but it gave birth to a new beefed-up genre of mobile devices. Google went on to release its own more developer-friendly mobile operating system, Android. Microsoft threw its hat into the ring with Windows Phone OS. Most major mobile phone companies now produce touchscreen smartphones.

### Triggering a societal shift

Jan 9, 2017, 12:00pm

10 Years With The iPhone: How Apple Changed Modern Society

[Anthony Karcz](https://www.forbes.com/sites/anthonykarcz/)

https://www.forbes.com/sites/anthonykarcz/2017/01/09/apple-iphone-10-year-anniversary/

In the decade that's followed, the iPhone has triggered a societal shift. We are always connected. To work, to our friends, to those that we want to be like and want to be like us. Our iPhones are our constant companions, letting us escape into mobile games that once required entire separate gaming systems to run (between Final Fantasy, Pathfinder, and Hearthstone, it's a wonder I get anything done during the day), access the world's library of digitized music, and browse practically all of human knowledge (the good, the bad, and the Reddit). They help us find and build communities. The iPhone and all the devices it's inspired in the decade since its inception have gone beyond "convenience" to "lifeline."

Admittedly advantages exist in iPhone making. It gave birth to a brand-new industry of producing touchscreen smart phones. It inspired so many major mobile phone companies to innovate, to release their own developer-friendly mobile operating systems. However, regardless of those benefits in the past, iPhone making process is doing so much harm to our society.

First is the environmental pollution. Even though Apple has made this commitment that it’s a green company, according the New York Times, Shanghai, a Chinese environmental group, has criticized the Apple company’s discharging polluted waste and toxic metals into surrounding communities and threatening public health. Moreover, the Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs in Beijing once released [a 46-page report](http://www.ipe.org.cn/Upload/Report-IT-V-Apple-II.pdf), which was based on visits to many of the factories’ regions and said that Apple suppliers often “fail to properly dispose of hazardous waste” and that 27 of the suppliers had been found to have environmental problems.

Moreover, iPhone factories cause great negative influences on workers, both physically and mentally.

First, health concerns. A worker at Foxconn Kunshan’s factory said, “**Prolonged direct contact with nickel in metal alloys and electroplating materials affects human skin.** If I already have a rash, it will itch even more.” At Foxconn Chengdu’s “iPad city”, workers operated polishing machines that produce clouds of microscopic aluminum dust 12 hours a day. **“I’m breathing aluminum dust at Foxconn like a vacuum cleaner,”** said one worker. With the workshop windows tightly shut, workers felt as if they were “suffocating.”

Also, because of iPhone’s high standard, as a worker explained, “The precision requirement for the screens of the iPhone cannot be detected by human eyes. We use microscopes to check product appearance. It’s impossibly strict.” And workers suffer from painful eye strain and headaches.