

Unsafe by Any Definition

A Personal Experience

The story I am about to relate affected me deeply. It is about the experience I had while visiting a company that molded plastics parts for consumer electronics products. The company I worked for was looking for a vendor to make the tool for a product that required plastic injection molded parts. This particular tooling can be quite expensive, often costing several hundred thousand dollars. The tool is generally cut from a solid piece of steel and slowly machined using complex and sophisticated equipment driven by computers. Some of the basic machining can still be done by hand.

We were visiting a large factory in Shenzhen China that created both the tools and did the manufacturing of plastic parts. We were considering them as a possible vendor. During this visit I saw many things that disturbed me deeply.

I saw a young man do some basic machining of raw steel on a large milling machine. I was standing about seven feet away from him. There was a pile of metal shards on the floor about a half inch deep in a seven foot radius around him. The shards were extremely sharp and stuck into the bottom of my shoes. The machine he was using was very loud. I noticed he was not wearing any protective gear: no goggles for his eyes, ear plugs to protect his hearing, or anything to cover his arms and hands from the sharp metal shards that were flying around him. When he turned the machine on, he would hold up a large piece of cardboard as a shield and turn his head.

In the same factory, I saw young women assembling notebook computer power supplies for some major computer brands. The factory had made the plastic covers for the power supply cases and were doing the assembly work as a value added service. The women had a large can of glue open. The fumes overwhelmed all of us; there was no ventilation. The women would pour the glue into an open plastic bowl and then use a brush to paint the glue around the edge of the power supplies.

Concluding Thoughts

This factory is unfortunately not unusual. One thing significant about this factory is the scope of who they manufactured for. After the factory tour, they gave us a power point presentation listing their major customers. This list of over twenty five companies was a virtual who's who of the electronics industry.

In the end, of course, we did not use this factory.

Fair Workplace Council is a California based nonprofit organization dedicated to living wages and safe working conditions in the manufacture of consumer electronics.

For more information contact us: www.fairworkplace.org. or e-mail us: info@fairworkplace.org



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