

Addressing the Use of N-Hexane

For all chemicals in the workplace, Apple's Code requires adequate ventilation systems, proper handling and disposal, and robust processes or risk assessments, training, and emergency response.

In 2010, we learned that 137 workers at the Suzhou facility of Wintek, one of Apple's suppliers, had suffered adverse health effects following exposure to n-hexane, a chemical in cleaning agents used in some manufacturing processes. We discovered that the factory had reconfigured operations without also changing their ventilation system. Apple considered this series of incidents to be a core violation for worker endangerment.

We required Wintek to stop using n-hexane and to provide evidence that they had removed the chemical from their production lines. In addition, Apple required them to fix their ventilation system. Since these changes, no new workers have suffered difficulties from chemical exposure.

To prevent future incidents at this facility, we required Wintek to work with a consultant to improve their Environmental Health and Safety processes and management systems. We are monitoring the implementation of these corrective actions and preventive measures, and will conduct a complete reaudit of the facility in 2011.

In parallel, Apple has verified that all affected workers have been treated successfully, and we continue to monitor their medical reports until full recuperation. Following China law, Wintek has paid medical treatment, meals, and foregone wages for sick or recuperating workers. A majority of the 137 workers have returned to employment at the same factory.

We are aware of another reported incident involving n-hexane. Apple learned that a logo supplier and its subcontractor were using the chemical. When we investigated, we found that the subcontractor had been shut down by local officials. We audited the logo supplier and verified that n-hexane was no longer in use. However, we found poor management systems for Environmental Health and Safety, and we are working with the facility to expedite corrections. We are also following up on the health of workers who were exposed to n-hexane at this facility.

*Source: Apple Supplier Responsibility 2011 Progress Report, p. 20
(http://images.apple.com/supplierresponsibility/pdf/Apple_SR_2011_Progress_Report.pdf)*