

JOHN MCCAIN AND IPHONE'S SICK CHINESE WORKERS

The buzz today focuses on John McCain's latest gaff: in his weekly Sunday show appearance with Christiane Amanpour yesterday, he claimed that iPhones and iPads are made in the US.

Host Christiane Amanpour spoke about her network's project to empty a house of goods that are not made overseas.

McCain responded:

"I think it's obviously a recognition of the reality and the trends, that cheaper, lower-cost labor products will usually prevail over products made in higher wage and income countries. I would also point out that if you emptied that house—if you had left a computer there or an iPad or an iPhone—those are built in the United States of America."

So everybody's been having a lot of fun laughing at the ignorance of the guy with the 10 houses again.

But in spite of the fact that, in an earlier segment, the Steelworkers' Leo Gerard described safety and environmental problems with goods imported from China, I've seen no mention of the fact that the workers at one Chinese iPhone plant were all getting sick because an iPhone manufacturer, Wintek, switched to n-hexane rather than alcohol to make the manufacturing process seconds faster.

Last summer, workers began fainting on the job and dozens made their way to the hospital. The company started testing workers and found mass exposure: Wintek says 62 employees had confirmed nerve damage from inhalation exposure to n-

hexane, which the company admits it used illegally for nearly a year in the production process. The illness, a form of peripheral neuropathy, came on so slowly that most didn't know they were ill until it was serious. Workers say others were sickened, but left the factory without treatment.

Their troubles began in October 2008, when Wintek's Suzhou factory introduced n-hexane to clean touch screens in the final stages of production. According to the local government, the company lacked necessary permits to handle the toxin, which dries more quickly than alcohol, shaving seconds from production time and speeding up the line.

[snip]

Each worker was required to clean 1,000 screens per day, dipping cotton cloths into a tray of hexane, swabbing the glass screens carefully and moving on, according to workers interviewed by GlobalPost. Over the course of a 12-hour shift, workers said one person would go through six trays of n-hexane, protected only by latex gloves and simple cotton masks – nothing close to the equipment that Chinese safety standards require for handling the chemical.

[snip]

So what do these workers, who earned about \$220 a month and lost nearly a year of their lives to illness, think of customers who buy the products that made them sick?

"I haven't really thought about it before," says the woman in the pink pajamas, pausing to consider.

Then, she decides, and says in a steady voice: "It would be good for the people who use those phones so happily to

consider the sacrifice we made.” [my
emphasis]

This is not just about what an out-of-touch fool McCain is, or the importance of making something here in the US again. There are also real consequences for the people that make it easier for Apple to get rich off of the latest gadgets by manufacturing in China.