Best Job to Get Slaughtered

By: Jee Min Lee

The machines shut down and lights go off. Workers drenched in sweat drag out of the slaughter section. Floors, walls, machines, blades, and conveyor belts are soaked in a mixture of animal blood, grease, and even human blood. A day's work is done for factory workers, but not for the factory cleaners. Cleaning is often regarded as the lowest-rated job. Whether the job is cleaning somebody else’s house, emptying garbage cans, or washing fabric diapers, cleaning seems like a petty job. But the worst and most dangerous is cleaning fast food factories.

The poor conditions in the fast food factories make cleaning a dangerous job. Safety is the most important aspect for any job. There would be no point working to achieve a better living if getting injured at work is an everyday incident. In the slaughtering section, there aren’t any facilities that can ensure cleaners’ safety. Every machine is dangerously armed with sharp blades, flame, chemicals, or blood, but they do not have any ladders or handles to hold to while cleaning. To scour machine hoods and huge containers, cleaners have to use step ladders or climb onto conveyor belts and other smaller machines. To make matters even worse, the belts and small machines are covered in blood and grease. More blood and grease than ordinary slaughterhouses because fast food factories process as much meat as possible per day. Without a reliable stand or grip, workers can easily slip and fall. One time, a worker cleaning a cylindrical tank full of calf blood accidentally slipped into it. There was nothing to hold onto in the tank and blood gradually crept up to his face. Two of his friends dived in to save him, but all three men drowned.

Agonizing working conditions are exacerbated as cleaners don’t receive necessary equipment from their company. To survive in a dangerous working condition, employers should at least provide the tools and uniforms to promote safety and efficiency. In the case of cleaning a fast food slaughterhouse, workers should get water-proof suits, chemical-resistant gloves, and protective masks. Though such is the ideal example, a new cleaner in a fast food factory would only get a set of polyester working suit, rubber boots, cotton gloves, and mask. One set of clothes aren’t enough because the worker can easily get drenched in blood and grease lying all over the factory. Also, the thin fabric mask and suit are inadequate in preventing workers from being exposed to strong toxic chlorine soap. Each night, workers suffer severe nausea from inhaling too many toxic chemicals.

What’s even more dangerous than not having enough working supplies is the lack of instructions. Every job, even trivial ones such as copying documents or answering phone calls, needs training. Training employees how to deal with machines in the workplace is crucial in avoiding trouble. Cleaning
companies don’t warn or hand out information booklets for their employees to prepare themselves for possible danger. Without any notification, cleaners have no idea what kind of machines there are, how they work, and what the machines can do to them. The lack of warning and knowledge cause unexpected deaths and injuries every night. For example, a worker can accidentally push a button and activate a bone crushing machine and its conveyor belt, sending a conveyor scrubber into the machine. One time, a cleaner didn’t know that a slaughtering machine was not turned off. The cleaner put his arm into an opening of the machine to clean its blades—inside the machine was dark without any light illuminating the swinging blades. With a slash, his arm got chopped off. Several other cleaners got stabbed or scarred with springy slaughter knives misplaced on floors.

Though they face so much danger and maltreatment, cleaners don’t receive proper medical care and attention. Employees need contracts that notice all of their options and guarantee a certain period of employment, a consistent amount of wages, medical care, and vacation time. Along with such agreement, employees need civil groups that know about their working condition and are able to help them argue for better treatment. Such guarantee or choice does not exist for fast food factory cleaners. The aspect that is least guaranteed for the cleaners is medical care. When injured, cleaners go to factory’s emergency room or a nearby pharmacy. Most of them can’t receive further treatment at bigger hospitals because the factory distorts or deletes the record of the accident. The factories fake their records to get awards for having the least trouble. While factories benefit from flawed records, cleaners suffer pain or death. With a supportive civil group, workers can protest forcefully against the unjust record-keeping, but cleaners don’t have such supporters. Not many people live near the fast food slaughterhouses. Even worse, not many people know about the poor working conditions of fast food factory cleaners or have ever considered the existence of such cleaning jobs.

Another matter of great concern is the workers’ broken life cycle due to working late nights. Working at night is inefficient, unhealthy, and dangerous for fast food factory cleaners. Late night working breaks the body’s rhythm, thus making workers more tired day by day. Such vicious cycle disables cleaners from properly managing their daytime tasks or having good quality times with family. Not enough strength and will to go on family picnics or helping children with homework can isolate cleaners out of their family. The vicious cycle also increases the chance of making mistakes that can lead to disastrous accidents. It is easier to slip into a blood tank or not notice a knife stuck in a mound of grease when the mind and body are too tired to concentrate.

Cleaning can be an okay job if the workplace is a house or school. There won’t be too much difficulty unless the owner of the house is obsessively fastidious or students at school are rude. However, cleaning fast food factories is all about dealing with unpredictable trouble and danger. Next time you get a hamburger set, be grateful for the factory cleaners.