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Report: Silicon Valley no picnic

Janis Mara, BUSINESS WRITER

Milarose Oriel, a contract cafeteria worker at South San Francisco-based biotechnology company [Genentech Inc.](#), says when a tray fell and broke her nose, the manager didn't suggest seeing a doctor, but just told her to wash her face.

And, according to a local union, Oriel is not alone. The approximately 6,000 contract food service workers in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties earn low wages, lack affordable health care and face job injuries while professional high-tech workers enjoy good pay and benefits, says a report by UNITE HERE Locals 2 and 19 released Wednesday.

The report calls for Silicon Valley companies like Genentech, named by Fortune magazine as one of the best places to work in the United States, to adopt a code of conduct requiring that food service contractors pay fair wages, comply with state laws and remain neutral toward union efforts to organize their workers.

Both food service contractor Guckenheimer Enterprises Inc., which employs Oriel and other food service workers, and Genentech say the contract employees are fairly treated.

"Guckenheimer has assured us that their policies, pay scale and benefits reflect the highest standards in the industry," said Genentech spokesman Geoff Teeter.

"Guckenheimer is one of many contractors we use at Genentech. We expect that all of our vendors will treat their employees with respect and provide them with appropriate wages and benefits," Teeter said. "For 38 years, it has been our priority to create a helpful and caring work environment for all our staff," said Frank Lapetina, Guckenheimer's chief operating officer, in a faxed statement. The privately owned Redwood Shores

company is 93 percent owned by its employees, according to Guckenheimer's Web site.

A survey of 80 of 150 Guckenheimer food service workers at Genentech found that 23 percent of them either had no health insurance or used government-funded insurance, according to the report. This is because family health insurance costs Genentech workers \$200 to \$400 a month, the union alleged, as much as 20 percent of workers' take-home pay.

The annual salary for contract food service workers is \$22,000, according to UNITE HERE President Bruce Raynor.

UNITE HERE was formed in 2004 as a merger of apparel and hotel and restaurant unions. It has been working to unionize Guckenheimer food service contract employees.

Professional employees at high-tech firms get tuition reimbursement, free iced tea and espresso, fully paid gym memberships and generous health insurance, and gourmet meals at the employee cafeteria -- served by Guckenheimer contract employees, said author Barbara Ehrenreich, who wrote the forward for the report.

"It might as well be a sweatshop serving those gourmet meals," Ehrenreich said.