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1. Wolfsburg: Volkswagen workers from company's birthplace furious and worried over emissions scandal;'I am worried about the future, because the situation is changing every hour - we fear for our jobs'

# Wolfsburg: Volkswagen workers from company's birthplace furious and worried over emissions scandal; 'I am worried about the future, because the situation is changing every hour - we fear for our jobs'

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## Body

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Wolfsburg was founded by Hitler in 1938 as the home of the famous Nazi "Peoples Car" or Volkswagen. Today, its 193,000 inhabitants are almost entirely dependent on the fortunes of the giant red brick VW car plant which dominates the skyline and almost every aspect of the town.

On 23 September, the blue uniformed VW guards that patrol every works entrance to the plant were proof that Wolfsburg is run like a virtual car state within a state. "We have been told not to talk to the press. Kindly leave the area," they told me repeatedly.

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Several of VW's 200,000 workers responded in the same way. But others coming of shift were clearly too angered by the company's deliberate manipulation of emissions data on 11 million VW diesel vehicles worldwide, to follow the company line. "I am shocked, I feel helpless," said a 37-year-old VW research and development engineer who asked not to be named. "I am worried about the future, because the situation is changing every hour - we fear for our jobs."

One of his colleagues, who said he had been working in the same department for six years, said that he doubted very much that Volkswagen's CEO, until 23 September, Martin Winterkorn - a boss renowned for carrying out spot inspections on VW car paint finish with a cigarette lighter and needles - was oblivious to the goings on.

"He must have known what was happening. I cannot see him hanging on to his job much longer," he insisted. Before he had resigned, others noted Mr Winterkorn's tenure was due to be approved by shareholders tomorrow, speculating as to whether the scandal could even lead to a come back by the CEO's rival, the veteran VW board member Ferdinand Piech.

Mr Piech officially distanced himself from his former protege Mr Winterkorn in an angry behind the scenes row last spring. He announced his retirement shortly afterwards. However an unnamed senior VW executive was quoted by Germany's Su(uumlaut)ddetusche Zeitung as saying "Everyone knows that Piech is not just sitting at home and cultivating roses."

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Younger VW staff were equally dismayed and said the scandal had led to them being ridiculed by friends and acquaintances: "We workers are being laughed at and criticised, although we have nothing to do with it," complained 21-year-old Justin Sprinke, who had only recently started with the company.

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The gleam also seemed to be coming off Wolfsburg's prestigious "Autostadt" or "Car city". The vast concrete and glass complex which stands next door to the VW plant is a tourist Mecca and attracts some 2,000 visitors a day to its numerous restaurants, Ritz Carlton Hotel and special pavilions devoted to Audi, Skoda and every other car make in the VW portfolio.

For many German car enthusiasts Wolfsburg's "Autostadt" amounts to an automotive nirvana and clearly arouses sensations similar to those felt by Catholics visiting the Vatican for the first time. A handful of "Autostadt" visitors, nearly all of them VW owners, climbed out of their spotless shiny vehicles and headed, looking a little glum, towards the complex's giant "Volkswagen Arena". "Not much of a day to be visiting VW" an elderly VW Touran driver confided to The Independent.

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