

Contract worker killed, two others injured at Indiana steel works

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On November 13, Michael Samuelson, a contractor working at an ArcelorMittal plant in Indiana, was struck and killed by falling debris while working near the west works basic oxygen furnace, according to ArcelorMittal management. The Lake County coroner has declared the death an accident. Two other contract workers were injured in the incident. Their condition has not been made public.

Indiana Occupational Safety and Health Administration's Chetrice Mosley said the agency is looking into the incident, noting that an investigation could take up to six months. An East Chicago police spokesperson indicated there will also be a police investigation.

South Bend Tribune reported Wednesday that ArcelorMittal has launched a joint investigation into the injury and death, enlisting both management and the United Steelworkers union. The USW local is directing questions about the incident to ArcelorMittal. United Steelworkers Local 1110 President Lonnie Asher remarked on Wednesday that no mill employees were injured.

All three workers were employed by the same contractor, which has not been named, and are members of Ironworkers Local 395.

Samuelson leaves behind a wife, Stephanie, and three children ages 15, 11 and 5. He was killed at the number 3 steel production plant on the west side of ArcelorMittal's massive, 4.8-square-mile Harbor Works facility in East Chicago, the largest steel mill in North America.

Safety at Harbor Works has been a deadly serious issue in recent years. In 2009, Angela Smith was struck by a crane and killed at Indiana Harbor East's hot strip mill. Also in 2009, three contract workers were severely injured in a slag explosion in the east works.

Two were airlifted to a burn unit, and the third was hospitalized for shrapnel injuries. In 2006, a crane at the west works basic oxygen furnace failed, spilling molten steel and injuring two workers. In August of this year, a steam turbine blower at the plant unexpectedly failed.

The west and east steelworks, formerly owned by separate outfits LTV Steel and Inland Steel, were acquired by Mittal Steel, now ArcelorMittal, whose corporate strategy has been straightforward: acquire faltering plants, lay off between half and two-thirds of the workers, and secure profitability by automating some aspects of production, squeezing the maximum productivity from the remaining workers, and continue to cut labor costs.

Just last week the company announced an 18.5 percent rise in its core profits for the third quarter of the year, or \$1.713 billion. As of last year, ArcelorMittal employed 263,000 workers in 20 countries.

Since the onset of the financial crisis in 2008, plant closures, mass layoffs, the implementation of two-tier pension systems, and a heavy reliance on contract workers have been critical to maintaining ArcelorMittal's remarkable profitability. The crisis of steel manufacturing in Europe has in recent years put enormous pressure on the company to pull value out of its remaining plants as the European works are closed.



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