

Worker killed at US Steel facility in Ecorse, Michigan

Thomas Gaist
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Chris Castro, a 36-year-old contractor with Connelly Crane and father of three, was killed early Friday morning at the US Steel Great Lakes Works facility in Ecorse, Michigan. Castro was operating a crane near the plant's number two oxygen furnace when it tipped over, according to reports.

Media relations director for US Steel (USS) Courtney Boone said in a statement, "This morning at Great Lakes Works in Ecorse, a contractor's employee was fatally injured while operating a crane. No other injuries have been reported and no additional details are available at this time."

"The contractor, Connelly Crane, is in the process of notifying the family. We offer our sincere condolences," Boone said.

USS and Connelly Crane have yet to release information about the cause of the accident. Photos published by *Fox Detroit* show the crane lying on the ground on its side.

This is only the latest deadly incident at a US Steel facility. Just days ago, on March 27, a giant pipe collapsed the roof of a USS building in Ecorse. Unsafe practices by the company, implemented to reduce labor costs, have led to numerous similar events in recent years.

Antonino Palazzolo, a 31-year-old father of two, was killed by an explosion at a USS facility in Ecorse last December. In that case, a malfunctioning oxygen furnace failed, causing 2,500-degree liquid metal to burn through a wall and onto a snowfield. The instant freezing of the molten metal generated multiple explosions and sent shrapnel flying. Palazzolo was killed as he worked in a shack several hundred feet away from the blast. Two other workers were injured.

One worker at the Ecorse plant told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the company had recently

transferred Palazzolo out of his engine cab to a less safe location on the ground "to save money."

Another former steelworker told the WSWWS that work procedures were being modified to cut labor costs in a manner that endangered the lives of workers. "A pipefitter is not just a pipefitter. He has to be an electrician now, a remote control crane operator and whatever else the company wants. When they put our crane operator on the floor, we had to load and unload the cranes ourselves. With doing so many things at one time, it's dangerous," he said.

Other recent fatal accidents at USS facilities include the crushing of pipefitter Thomas Pichler Jr. in 2008 at a US Steel mill on Zug Island, and the killing of Nicholas Revetta from a gas explosion at USS's Clairton, Pennsylvania mill from an explosion the cause of which has never been revealed by the company.

In comments after Palazzolo's death, Wanda Pichler, Thomas's mother, said that the real cause of the incident would be covered up by the company and that USS had blocked any real investigation of her son's death.

According to an International Labor Organization (ILO) report, "Safety and Health at Work," more than 2 million deaths occur globally each year, more than 6,300 per day, as a result of workplace accidents and diseases acquired on the job.

A worker dies on the job every 15 seconds, according to the ILO. Child laborers are among the main victims, suffering millions of occupational accidents every year. In the developing countries, where masses of people are continuously being recruited from rural areas and thrust into hyper-exploitative work environments, industrial deaths and injuries occur at staggering rates, well above those of the advanced capitalist countries.

Only a small fraction of workers worldwide receive any level of insurance against such accidents. Moreover, the accidents themselves are greatly underreported, according to a 2009 study from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), which found that pressure on employees and workplace doctors and nurses not to report accidents results in many accidents going unrecorded.

Far from defending workers against the life-threatening conditions, the trade unions are active collaborators in business practices that are deadly for workers. United Steelworkers (USW) has worked hand in hand with Wall Street and the transnational steel conglomerates to carry out hundreds of thousands of layoffs and impose speedup on the workforce over decades. The conditions created by intensified exploitation of workers abetted by USW greatly increase the danger of worker deaths on the job.

The USW has worked consistently to betray strikes and impose concessions on its members. In the summer of 2013, USW backed a contract for workers at the 3M plant in Tonawanda that imposed a two-tier wage system and eliminated pensions for new-hires. Around the same time, the USW pushed a sellout contract on Caterpillar workers in South Milwaukee that froze wages and pensions of current workers for 6 years, while forcing workers onto 401k plans and setting up a “market-based” wage system.

Ron Bloom, a leading consultant to USW, was later appointed by the Obama administration as “manufacturing czar” and tasked with implementing speedup and wage-cutting nationwide.



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