# Contractor electrocuted at Detroit area auto parts facility

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A contract worker died early Wednesday morning when the truck he was unloading came in contact with a power line. The accident happened at a plant operated by auto parts supplier Tower Automotive, located in Clinton Township in the northern suburbs of Detroit.

The boom of the truck brushed an overhead power line as the driver was working the hydraulic controls to drop off a large trash container. Plant workers found the driver's body lying outside the truck. He died at the scene. A video shot by a news helicopter showed the burned-out shell of a semi-trailer.

The Tower Automotive facility is a stamping and forging plant that produces parts for Ford, General Motors and Chrysler. All the scrap from the plant is put in large containers outside the building. A trucking company then hauls away the full containers and drops off empty containers. The driver of the truck was apparently dropping off an empty container at the time of the accident. Electricity and gas conglomerate DTE Energy said it was looking into a possible problem with overhead power lines.

"An electrical cause is definitely not ruled out at this time," said Clinton Township fire marshal Ronald Young. "Without a doubt it's accidental at this time—pending the medical examiner's results, and DTE's results with the overhead power lines. That will give us the cause."

The victim, whose name has not yet been released, worked for Technical Logistics (TLC), based in Romulus, Michigan. He was only identified as a 51-year-old man from Canton, Michigan. TLC is a waste-disposal company employing 39 drivers operating in southeast Michigan. It provides waste removal as well as trash dumpster rentals.

Tower International is an auto parts supplier with annual revenue of over $2 billion based in Livonia, Michigan. It employs close to 9,000 workers in 29 production facilities worldwide. Around 300 workers are employed at the Shelby Township facility. Tower officials had no comment on the incident, other than to offer perfunctory condolences to the family of the victim.

Workers at the Tower Automotive Shelby Township facility are members of United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 155. In 2006, the UAW and the United Steelworkers signed agreements entailing substantial concessions with Tower Automotive in the wake of the company filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. The UAW did not report the death on its web site. A Local 155 official contacted by the WSWS could supply no information other than the little that has been publically reported.

The Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) tallies 23 fatal accidents in the state so far in 2014. Among the deaths it has reported is 55-year-old Kim Duong who died August 25. He was operating a shot blast machine in Jackson, Michigan, when two metal guards that were placed in front of the machine struck him. Each of the guards weighed 632 pounds. The guards were there because they were running a part in the machine that was so large that the doors could not close.

A 34-year-old die setter was crushed to death in Grand Rapids in June. The worker, an employee of Grand Rapids Plastic, was cleaning a machine when another employee started it, without being aware that someone was inside. Also in June, an overhead lineman in Carleton, Michigan, died after receiving an electrical shock. He was replacing a pole to a transformer.

The death at Tower Automotive was the latest in a series of fatalities in southeastern Michigan-area auto parts plants. In June, a worker was killed at Peerless

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Steel in Buena Vista Township outside Saginaw. Andrew Beckman was loading 12-ton steel rods into a flatbed trailer by himself when the load apparently shifted, crushing him underneath.

Last March, 23-year-old Erik Deighton was killed at Colonial Plastics in Shelby Township. He was trying to clear an obstruction from a press machine when the machine cycled to stamp, crushing him.

In March 2013, a 43-year-old worker at Mollertech, also in Shelby Township, was working on an overhead crane when a 5-ton die fell on him, trapping him underneath. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

The auto parts industry is notorious for low-wage sweatshops. The UAW betrayed a series of auto parts strikes in the 1980s, in order to deliberately lower the costs for the Big Three Detroit automakers.

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were 4,628 fatal workplace injuries in 2012, the latest year for which information is available. That amounts to 12 deaths every single day. The total includes 741 deaths in transportation and warehousing, 509 in agriculture, 806 in construction, 327 in manufacturing and 181 in mining. Agriculture had the highest overall death rate with 21.2 deaths per 100,000 workers. That was followed by mining with 15.6 and transportation and warehousing with 13.3.

Deaths involving contractors accounted for 15 percent of all deaths. Electrocutions account for about 8 percent of deaths.

The US Occupational Safety and Health Administration remains abysmally underfunded, with only 2,200 inspectors to cover 130 million US workers and 7 million workplaces. It carried out 39,228 inspections in 2013, about 1 for every 178 workplaces.

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