

Workers speak out

Unsafe conditions common at Fiat Chrysler Jefferson plant where two workers died

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On May 5, Donald Megge, age 53, a millwright, died while cleaning a waste water filter press at the Fiat Chrysler Jefferson North Assembly plant in Detroit. The veteran worker was working alone when the machine cycled, crushing him between the plates in the press.

One day later, 41-year-old Lee Duncan, a team leader, died while working at the plant. The Michigan Occupation Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) told the *WSWS Autoworkers Newsletter* it has not investigated the incident, saying Duncan's death was due to unspecified "natural causes."

According to a MIOSHA spokesperson when "working with an employer to verify that a death is not work related," the agency sends out a questionnaire. It does not as a matter of course make an onsite inspection, meaning it takes the company's word.

MIOSHA spokesperson Tanya Baker told the newsletter that their investigation into Megge's death could take "several weeks or months to complete." She added, "MIOSHA cannot provide further information on an open investigation."

In both cases management and UAW have remained silent on the circumstances of the fatalities. Jefferson workers contacted by the *WSWS* say the neglect of safety by management is common, with the UAW acting essentially as attorneys for management's disregard of safety procedures.

"As far as the accident involving Megge," a worker at the Jefferson North Assembly Plant said, "we just get hearsay from other workers. He took the job because otherwise he was going to get laid off. It is not a pleasant job. You are working with sewage. The press filters out solids.

"He went in there alone. I am guessing it was a routine thing--Preventive Maintenance. He did it day

after day and nothing happened.

"After the accident management came in with a piece of paper and read the official company statement. They referred all questions to the printed statement. We were left in the dark. The UAW did not offer any answers either.

"Then within a week another man died. This was over at the Kuka Glass part of the plant.

"In the wake of his death OSHA launched an investigation. The day before OSHA was scheduled to come in they sent a worker to go clean the area. If OSHA had come in and seen what was really going on they would have issued citations. It was cluttered with all sorts of plastic pieces on the floor. They didn't want OSHA to see that.

"They had him do the cleanup while the conveyor was running. That is a huge no, no. You just don't do that.

"Lately there has been a shake-up. Now they are saying someone has to work with a skilled worker on maintenance. I don't know how long it will last."

He addressed some of the issues involving routine neglect of safety he has encountered during his time at the plant.

"Under our maintenance system they must have the machines locked out before inspection, but with only 1 and 1/2 hours between shifts there is no time to do the required correct maintenance, so they rarely get inspected properly.

"They have cancelled changeover three years in a row. That is the main time for maintenance. They don't shut down the line while the plant is in operation, so in other words they never do enough maintenance. Worker safety seems to mean nothing compared to keeping that line running.

“A little safety issue then leads to a big safety issue and that leads to a death. If we never shut down the line that means we can’t do the things that need to be done.”



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