

Worker killed in Ohio Honda plant

David Brown
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Ghouse Gulam, a contract worker, died Monday morning after being hit by a forklift just five minutes into his shift at the Honda R&D Americas facility in Raymond, Ohio. This death has occurred as part of the drive to increase profits by reducing labor and production costs throughout the global auto industry.

Gulam, 61, was struck by a forklift driven by another contract worker while crossing a causeway between two buildings at the facility. The forklift was carrying a load of trash that may have obscured the driver's visibility. A county coroner investigator told the *Columbus Dispatch* that the causeway did not have surveillance cameras so there is no footage of the accident.

Gulam was then driven to Memorial Hospital of Marysville, and declared dead from a crushed skull at 7:35 a.m. According to Honda, Gulam was from Livonia, Michigan but had moved to neighboring Delaware County about 40 minutes from the work site.

The Union County Coroner's Office and County detectives are investigating the accident, as is the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA).

Many basic facts about Gulam and the accident are being hidden from the public by Honda. Honda of North America's manager of corporate communications, Mark Morrison, refused to provide any information to the *World Socialist Web Site* on the nature of Gulam's work at the facility or even what company he worked for that contracted with Honda. Morrison cited the company's supposed "respect for the dead" for withholding the information.

The OSHA district office in Columbus, Ohio similarly declined to provide any information, saying they could not speak on an ongoing investigation. The county coroner's office claimed to not have the information on hand.

Contractors are increasingly used at auto plants in lieu of traditional employees, in order to fire workers at

will and avoid the expense of paying into their health care or retirement. A central issue in the recent contract negotiations with the United Auto Workers was the desire of the Big Three automakers to bring in lower paid contract and temporary workers, which the UAW has accepted. The higher turnover and poor compensation has led to increasing injuries for contract workers.

The Honda facilities in Marysville, Ohio are non-union and the UAW has never been able to get a foothold at the plant because of its decades-long collaboration in the slashing of the jobs and wages by the Detroit-based automakers.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), contract workers were the victims of 12 percent of all workplace fatalities in 2011. By 2014 they accounted for 17 percent of workplace deaths overall and 28 percent within the machinery manufacturing sector, including auto plants. In the last few weeks alone two contract workers have been killed at Ford—one in Kansas City and another at the Chicago Assembly Plant.

The number of fatalities for contracted workers rose by 6 percent between 2013 and 2014 to 797, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. Overall 4,679 American workers total were killed on the job in 2014—the most recent year statistics are available—a 2 percent increase from 2013.

The rate of fatal injuries dramatically rises the older a worker gets. The number of workers 55 years and over who were fatally injured in 2014 increased 9 percent to 1,621, the highest annual total since the inception of the fatality census in 1992. Those 65 and older were killed from work injuries at a rate of 10.2 per 100,000, more than three times the national average. Many workers without a defined benefit pension are forced to push back their retirement and run this higher risk of injury or death just to make ends meet.

In contrast to their workforce, Honda's profits have risen over the past year with the first fiscal quarter of 2016 (April-June 2015) seeing a 20 percent jump in net profit, up to \$1.5 billion. This was driven by increased sales in both North America and Asia, which more than offset costs relating to their recall of faulty airbags.

Defects in airbags built by Takata for 10 different car companies, and affecting several Honda models, led to the spraying of metal shrapnel into some vehicles when deployed. Honda has confirmed nine deaths from airbags in their cars so far. As of October of last year more than 3.5 million Honda cars have had their airbags replaced, but the total number of cars known to have the problematic airbags is over 9 million.

When the defect was first uncovered in 2009, Honda worked to keep the recall to a minimum, initially keeping it to 4,000 vehicles. In 2014, Honda was fined \$70 million by the American National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) for failing to report 1,729 death and injury claims related to their vehicles between 2003 and 2014.



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