

GM skilled trades worker killed at Defiance, Ohio factory

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A General Motors skilled trades worker was killed Tuesday in a fall at the General Motors Defiance, Ohio Casting Operations facility. The worker has been identified as 50-year-old Terry Bodenbender.

According to the Defiance County Sheriff's office, Bodenbender, an electrician, suffered a fatal fall around 1:02 p.m. The plant was last inspected by the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) last June. The company received two minor citations at the time.

The plant employs 1,026 hourly workers and builds cylinder blocks, cylinder heads and crankshafts for V-6 and V-8 engines. It has been in operation since 1948.

As of this writing, few facts are available. According to OSHA, Bodenbender was performing maintenance on an overhead crane at the time of the tragedy. He apparently fell 25-30 feet into a pit below, suffering fatal injuries. OSHA says it is conducting an investigation, but no further details are being released.

Bodenbender is survived by two children: son Austin and daughter Sydney. The funeral is set for Friday.

The death of Bodenbender follows a rash of recent deaths at auto factories. It has been just one month since the death of a contract worker at a Honda plant in Ohio and another death at the Ford Chicago Assembly plant. Just before Christmas David Scott Ford, a contract worker, was killed on the assembly line at the GM Fairfax, Kansas facility.

In the wake of the Defiance tragedy, GM only offered perfunctory condolences. The United Auto Workers has made no official statement on the incident.

A General Motors skilled trades worker from Indiana, who wished to remain anonymous, spoke to the WSWS about the death. "Skilled trades work definitely has more safety issues. That is one of the reasons that GM is going with contractors. If a

contractor gets killed, it is not GM's fault.

"With contractors, all GM has to do is show a couple of safety videos. The contractor is supposed to be responsible for safety issues, but they tend to take shortcuts.

"If the worker was on an overhead crane he should have been tethered. Then, if he fell, he would have been left dangling.

"All you have to do is forget one little item.

"That is why if you are working 30 feet in the air you are supposed to have a ground man. They are supposed to check on each other to make sure they are wearing a harness.

"GM has been downsizing and downsizing all the time. Skilled trades workers are on the clock six days a week, 12 hours a day. There is pressure to get things done."

He spoke about the "cross training" of skilled trades classifications being pushed by GM and the UAW as part of its drive to eliminate the jobs of skilled trades workers. First implemented under terms of the 2011 UAW-GM contract, the cross training program is designed to further erase the distinction between skilled trades classifications. "People I know who have been cross trained say it is a joke.

"I used to teach apprentices for skilled trades. In every class I taught I developed a curriculum. There are no classes designed for cross training purposes. You are basically learning as you work on the job."

He said it was not in GM's best self-interest to be open and forthcoming about the circumstances of deaths and serious injuries on the job. "They have to report some information to the government, but the rest they keep to themselves. It is not good advertising for them to say, 'Look, we are killing employees.' The UAW is not going to put out that information either."

The death of Bodenbender recalls the death of Fiat Chrysler skilled tradesman Donald Megge, aged 53. He was crushed to death May 5, 2015 in an accident at the wastewater treatment facility at the Jefferson North Assembly Plant in Detroit. Megge was a millwright and a wastewater treatment plant operator with many years of experience.

While the UAW and Fiat Chrysler claimed to be investigating the tragedy, no further information has been forthcoming. Megge was apparently working alone at the time of the accident—a dangerous practice sanctioned by the UAW to help cut costs.

GM is counting on its servants in OSHA and the UAW to cover up the circumstances of the latest autoworker death in Ohio. The national committee on health and safety, run jointly by the UAW and GM, makes a mockery of any adversarial relationship between the union and management. Workers can expect no serious probe of the circumstances of the death of Bodenbender from that quarter, any more than from OSHA.



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