

Ford contract worker killed at Rouge complex outside of Detroit

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A contract worker at the Dearborn Diversified Manufacturing Plant, part of the giant Rouge complex of Ford Motor Company, died when he fell from an overhead crane that had been modified a year ago to accommodate new production equipment. The tragedy occurred Wednesday morning when the worker, Ricky McIntosh (55), an inspector for Martin Crane Corporation, which has a contract with Ford to maintain the equipment, stepped onto jury-rigged, plywood decking that collapsed. He was then sent hurtling 50 feet to the concrete floor. At the time, he was inspecting electric drives on the thirty-ton, mobile crane.

Ford workers contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site* reported that the crane had been modified a year ago when new presses were installed in the frame building. Apparently the overhead gondola that was designed to house and protect the operator and maintenance workers was not high enough to clear the new presses and a modification to its structure was made on site. The original floor was cut out and replaced with plywood.

A crane operator from the nearby stamping plant told the WSWS that the inspector died instantly from his fall. He, along with others we spoke with, denounced with contempt the company report that the man died in the hospital of injuries suffered in the plant. "They do that to protect Ford," he said, "although he died instantly, in the plant."

Prior to the accident a massive retooling had taken place in the middle of 2014, when the company switched to an all-aluminum body for its hottest selling and most profitable vehicle, the Ford F-150 pickup truck. It was the largest transformation of any manufacturing facility in the history of the company. The move appeared to pay off handsomely as company

profits rose to an all-time pre-tax high of \$3.8 billion in the first quarter of 2016.

Since then profits have fallen off as sales slip and stockpiles of vehicles crowd company storage lots. Workers faced extended layoffs around the holidays and expect seven weeks of down time early in 2017, although they have heard nothing definite.

Reviewing financial reports of the company's sluggish performance on the stock market, one gets a sense of the relentless pressure from stockholders to increase production and cut costs. Since retooling in 2014, the Ford Rouge truck plant has pumped out 1,400 trucks every single day at a rate of 60 vehicles per hour.

Another worker voiced his disgust at the efforts of the corporation to deny responsibility for the worker's death. "Nobody ever dies in the factory," he said. "It's always in the ambulance or at the hospital." He explained that Ricky McIntosh was a single parent with sole custody of his 14-year-old daughter. He went on to denounce a report that the corporation would deny responsibility and financial restitution to McIntosh's family because of a regulation that maintenance workers are required to wear a safety harness.

Both local and state officials rallied to protect the corporation from liability for violations of safe work practices or any allegation of wrongful death. A spokeswoman for the State of Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA), Tanya Baker, said the agency had sent a compliance officer to the plant to open an investigation that could take months to complete. And the Wayne County Medical Examiner said Thursday that Ricky McIntosh died at a hospital from multiple injuries, and ruled that his death was accidental.

MIOSHA reported that it had made just three inspections of the Ford facility over the course of the

past 10 years. The investigations produced two serious and two other citations resulting in a token \$2,450 in fines.

No serious investigation can be expected from the United Auto Workers. As of this writing the UAW has issued no statement on the accident. Any investigation would be conducted under the auspices of the UAW-Ford joint committee on health and safety. Needless to say such a probe would be a whitewash designed to absolve management.

Workers should recall the 1999 explosion at the Ford Rouge powerhouse that killed six workers and severely injured 14 others.

In the end Ford merely had to pay a slap on the wrist fine, less than one day's profit, despite evidence that the company was well aware of unsafe conditions at the power plant. As for the UAW, it endorsed the whitewash. Indeed, the state MIOSHA report implicated the UAW along with Ford management in covering up the unsafe conditions that led to the tragedy.



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