

Electrician, 41, killed at Ford Kentucky Truck Plant on Saturday

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Early on Saturday Ivan Bridgewater III, an electrician, was killed in a tragic accident while working third shift at the Ford Kentucky Truck Plant (KTP) in Louisville, Kentucky. He was 41 years old. He left behind his wife, Megan, and their young son in Seymour, Indiana, near Louisville.

Shortly before 1:00 AM on Saturday morning, Louisville Metro Police responded to a call of “a person down” at Ford KTP. According to a police report, when officers arrived they found Ford Security and Louisville Emergency Medical Service personnel giving CPR to Bridgewater, who died at the scene.

Media reports give conflicting accounts of Bridgewater’s death. Several media outlets, including the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Fox23, and WHIOTV7 reported on Saturday that the police believed the cause of death to be electrocution. However, WTHR Indianapolis News reported the next day, “Ford has clarified that the worker was not electrocuted.”

A post by Bridgewater’s father, Ivan Senior, a fiction writer in Florida, commemorates his son’s life and has received over 5,100 reacts and 2,569 shares as of this writing. He writes: “Hello everyone. This is a picture of me, and my son Ivan. My son was killed last night in an industrial accident at the Ford Plant in Louisville Kentucky. I am at a loss for words as I type this. If you are a member of my family, please spread the word. He left behind a beautiful wife, and a wonderful son. He was a fine young man. I was very proud of him. Parents should never outlive their children. The pain is too great to bear.”

Another worker, 54-year-old Ronald Cassady, died at KTP in December 2009 from blunt force trauma after being hit in the head and chest with a beam that fell while workers were carrying it inside the plant.

According to workers interviewed after Cassady’s death, “It was the first death of a UAW member in an accident at the plant in many years.”

Ford Motor Company was fined only \$25,000 for Cassady’s death, according to inspection reports by the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) web site, and issued only two “serious” citations out of a total of five.

A worker at the nearby Ford Louisville Assembly Plant (LAP) spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* after Bridgewater’s death. He described the stressful conditions that electricians face at KTP in order to meet Ford’s production standards. The two Ford factories in Louisville employ nearly 14,000 hourly and salaried workers, the largest concentration of Ford workers in the US.

“At KTP, the electricians typically work 12-hour days. They ride them so hard just to keep the line running. When you’re already tired and stressed out like that, mistakes are bound to happen.

“There will be four to five supervisors on them [the workers] if they stop the line for any reason. There are harsh penalties if you do that. They watch you on the video screens, and have scoreboards that can tell them where you are at, when the line went down and what part.”

He informed the *Autoworker Newsletter* of similar conditions at Louisville Assembly. “One worker on the line had a heart attack. Someone stopped the line and they wrote him up for not turning the line back on.”

He described the ways in which the union acts hand-in-hand with management to enforce labor discipline. “We have alternative work schedules, so no one knows what time they’re going to get off. They have people called quality leaders, who are union members that act like supervisors. They go to management meetings. The

company managers just sit and watch the screens [surveillance cameras] the whole time.

“The quality leaders come in on your lunch break and tell you how much longer you have to stay over your scheduled shift. We often end up working over.”

The worker explained that electricians are forced to work without backup. “There is usually only one electrician for each line. So they usually work alone.”

He also described hazards with the machinery. “The robots will completely lose memory, so all sorts of things can happen then. There is a lockout procedure, but they are under so much pressure that most of the time they don’t have time to lock any of the equipment out.”

Skilled trades workers, which include electricians, work under a different contract than production workers. According to the LAP worker, the United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 862, the unit which covers workers at both KTP and LAP, conducted a contract vote over the summer of 2017 for the skilled trades workers that resulted in the proposed deal being voted down. A second vote was scheduled to take place on December 9, but “the vote was cancelled due to the death.”

Nothing can be expected from the joint UAW-Ford joint committee on health and safety, which operates as a front for management. These committees do nothing to protect workers’ lives, while providing cushy jobs for union officials.

Local 862 has worked with Ford Motors and the Kentucky State Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to cover up dangerous working conditions at both plants in order to maintain production.

To give one example, the 2015 contract for LAP workers included a letter of agreement between Ford and the UAW Local 862 that required management to give extra breaks to workers when the actual temperature reads above 90 degrees Fahrenheit. However, federal OSHA guidelines recommend that employers use the heat index, which takes into consideration humidity and actual temperature, and implement precautions when it reaches above 90 degrees Fahrenheit (still an absurdly high limit, given that production workers also must wear heavy protective gear on the job).

However, the union local and Ford decided that LAP

was to continue to use actual temperature to gauge the safety hazard to workers, and provide only two free bottles of Gatorade to prevent heat-related hazards, despite federal guidelines. Several workers have complained of overheating at the plant.

The complete indifference of the UAW to workers’ health and safety is demonstrated by the fact that the union has said almost nothing about Bridgewater’s death. No mention of it is made on the Local 862 web site. The Local 862 Facebook page has only one post, which reads, “In Memoriam of our Brother!” It does not mention Ivan Bridgewater’s name or any known details of his death; his family, who is no doubt suffering greatly; and says nothing about the brutal conditions that led to this tragedy.



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