

One worker killed, one injured hours apart at Florida's Walt Disney World

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A 33-year-old worker was killed at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, on Monday following an accident with a Toro utility cart. According to witnesses, Juan Alberto Ojeda was working on the cart's battery when it jumped anywhere from three to six feet up a nearby chain link fence before it landed on and crushed him behind Disney's Caribbean Beach Resort.

Danny Vasquez, a fellow worker who witnessed the incident, saw the cart move up the fence and fall on top of Ojeda, whom he rushed to help. According to the *Orlando Sentinel*, Ojeda asked Vasquez to back the cart off of him and told him that he could not breathe, before falling unconscious and dying at the scene. Vasquez and another worker, Josh Willner, struggled to lift the cart off Ojeda, but were unsuccessful due to its weight.

In a statement to the *Washington Post*, Walt Disney World Resort President George A. Kalogridis said, "All of us at Walt Disney World Resort are deeply saddened today by the loss of one of our Cast Members"—the term used by Walt Disney to refer to workers at its resorts. "Our thoughts and concerns are with his family, friends, and fellow co-workers." Kalogridis called Ojeda's death "a tragic accident" and said the company is "providing resources and care for those affected."

Hours later, around 10:30 p.m., another male worker was injured after a fall while working at Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge. The worker called 911 and was taken to Orlando Regional Medical Center, where he was reported to be recovering from non-life-threatening injuries.

The Orange County Sheriff's Department was involved in investigating both the death and the injury. The Federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has not reported the opening of an investigation into the incidents.

The empty statements of Disney officials who feign sympathy for the workers in order to save the company's reputation will not be taken seriously.

The death of Ojeda and the injury of the other worker occurred only a few weeks before Disney is set to acquire most of 21st Century Fox for \$71.3 billion. In December 2017, Disney announced a bid to acquire 21st Fox for \$52.4 billion in stock. Disney increased its bid in June 2018 following an offer by Comcast to acquire Fox.

The merging of Disney and Fox operations is expected to cost some 5,000 to 10,000 jobs, according to an analysis made by Rich Greenfield of BTIG. The value of Disney's stock has fluctuated during the six months since the purchase was announced yet continues to enjoy historic highs. After dropping to \$16.77 in 2009, Disney stock has climbed over the past decade to \$108.04 at the time of this writing.

The enrichment of Disney's chief executives and major shareholders comes at the expense of the company's workers around the world, whether directly employed by the company in its hotels and resorts or working as subcontracted cheap labor in factories to make its retail products.

Workers at Disney's resorts and parks in the US, which include the Disney World theme park in Orlando and Disneyland in Anaheim, California, make on average less than \$20 per hour. Adjusted for inflation, workers' wages at Disney's theme parks dropped during the period 2000-2017. Meanwhile, annual revenue from the conglomerate's parks and resorts operations climbed steadily from \$11.5 billion in 2008 to \$18.42 billion in 2018.

The company is responsible for a number worker deaths and injuries over the past two decades alone:

- May 2003: 36-year-old stage technician Christopher Bowman was killed after falling 60 feet from a catwalk in the Hyperion Theatre at Disneyland Resort. California State Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Cal/OSHA) issued \$18,350 in fines and two citations to Disney after a six-month investigation. One serious

citation was issued for failure to provide a safe platform for workers.

- August 2009: 47-year-old performer Mark Priest died four days after slipping on a puddle of water and striking his head against a wall while performing as a sword fighter in Disney's Captain Jack's Pirate Tutorial at the Magic Kingdom in Orlando. Federal OSHA was not contacted until Priest was pronounced dead.

- March 2011: 52-year-old mechanic Russell Roscoe was killed after being struck by a ride vehicle while he performed maintenance work on the Primeval Whirl roller coaster in Disney's Animal Kingdom theme park in Orlando. Federal OSHA proposed \$69,000 in fines against Disney and found the company in violation of four safety regulations.

- August 2011: Disney was probed following an undercover investigation by human rights group Students and Scholars Against Corporate Misbehaviour that uncovered numerous violations at the Sturdy Factory in Shenzhen, China, which manufactured Disney's top-selling *Cars* toys. One worker reportedly committed suicide after jumping off of the roof of the plant after being verbally abused by managers. Other violations cited include the use of child labor, forced overtime to meet demand, and exposure to poisonous chemicals.

- April 2016: A worker was electrocuted to death while performing maintenance on Phantom Manor, an attraction at Disney's Frontierland at Disneyland Paris.



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