

Ford worker dies of apparent workplace injury at Chicago Heights stamping plant

Alexander Fangmann**26 October 2018**

According to a report published on Patch.com, James Chalmers, 48, died after apparently suffering some kind of workplace injury related to a trash compactor at the Ford stamping plant in Chicago Heights, Illinois Thursday. The death adds to the growing toll exacted by dangerous working conditions directly related to the drive by Ford, abetted by the United Auto Workers, to increase production and profits at the expense of worker health and safety.

The Patch report cites police, who say Chalmers, a worker in the rear waste area, was found unresponsive next to a trash compactor, "with severe trauma to his chest area," strongly suggesting the injury was work-related.

As the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* has previously reported, Ford's profits have been reliant on an increase in the proportion of so-called temporary part-time (TPT) workers and other short-term workers, who are less likely to push back against unsafe line speeds or assigned tasks because of fear of termination.

At some plants, such as Ford's Woodhaven Stamping Plant, more recently hired workers are even segregated from senior workers so that they are not educated about maintaining a safe pace of production and resistance to management abuse.

This is not the first death at the Chicago Heights stamping plant. In 1998, a worker standing underneath a crane was crushed when a cable snapped, releasing a large piece of metal, which fell on him. A few years before that, in 1995, another worker was killed when he was caught in a die press. Workers have also suffered major injuries, including two electricians who in 1995 suffered severe burns when they caught fire working on equipment.

More recently, electrician Ivan Bridgewater at Ford's Kentucky Truck Plant in Louisville was killed when he

was pinned by a semi-trailer while working in a poorly lit loading dock. At Flat Rock Assembly south of Detroit, veteran worker Lynn Hagood had her legs crushed by machinery after falling into a pit. Hagood had been assigned to fill in at a workstation on the production line that she had not worked on before and for which she had not been adequately trained. The injury to Hagood sparked a rebellion by workers at the plant, who walked out after the accident rather than finish their shift as demanded by management.

In both the case of Ivan Bridgewater and Lynn Hagood, the UAW colluded with management to cover up the causes of the accident and ensure there would be no serious consequences for Ford. The death at the Chicago Heights stamping plant follows the still unexplained death last month of a 24-year-old worker at the Ford Sterling Axle plant north of Detroit. The UAW has refused to answer any questions over the incident, despite indications that his death might have been workplace-related.

Conditions at Chicago Heights stamping, like those at other Ford plants, have deteriorated due to the UAW's collusion with management. UAW Local 588, the union at the stamping plant, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Conditions at Ford mirror conditions in large sections of industry. Since the global financial crash of 2008, the financial aristocracy has carried out a vast restructuring of class relations that has resulted in a significant increase in workplace deaths and injuries. In 2016, the last year for which there are full figures, 5,190 workers were killed on the job, up 7 percent from 2015, with 2.9 million nonfatal workplace injuries or illnesses.



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