

Deadly Legionella bacteria found at Ford Dearborn Truck plant

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Last week Ford reported low levels of bacteria that cause Legionnaires' disease at the Dearborn Truck Assembly plant outside of Detroit. The announcement came at the same time *Legionella* bacteria was reported at the Old Main building at Wayne State.

According to a report in the *Detroit Free Press* the discoveries came during "routine" testing at the cooling towers at both Wayne State and the Ford Rouge complex where the top selling Ford F-150 pickup truck is built. Notifications were posted at three locations where the tests were conducted.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) the *Legionella* bacteria, which causes the deadly Legionnaires' disease, can grow in water systems such as cooling towers. The Occupational and Safety Administration (OSHA) has no specific standard for *Legionella*. According to OSHA, "There currently is no specific OSHA standard for Legionellosis; however, Section 5(a)(1) of the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act of 1970, 29 USC 654(a)(1), (referred to as the 'General Duty Clause') requires employers to furnish to each worker 'employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm' to its workers. OSHA may enforce the General Duty Clause where a workplace has a recognized, serious hazard for which there is no specific OSHA standard (e.g., occupational exposure to *Legionella* in water systems). Employers should know the hazards and risks with having water sources in the workplace and maintain all systems to prevent *Legionella* growth."

A *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* reporter called United Auto Workers Local 600 at the Dearborn Assembly Plant. When asked if any letter or notification was sent to workers by the union, the UAW

local employee responded, "No there was no letter or notifications sent to employees." When this reporter attempted to press for more information, the call was disconnected. On the Local 600 website or Facebook there is no mention of any health or safety concerns in regards to the *Legionella* finding.

Kelli Felker, Ford Company's manufacturing and labor manager, reported the findings to the *Free Press*. On June 20, according to the *Free Press*, the amounts of bacteria that were found were 2, 2 and 6 CFU/ml (colony forming units per milliliter), which is the standard measurement of bacteria or fungus.

According to Felker, "Tanks were treated a retesting will occur in early July. The company is required to notify OSHA about legionella bacteria levels of 100 CFU/ml or higher. But this contamination didn't come close.

"Per our Ford process we posted a notification in the areas in which we received a positive test.

"We take the safety of our workforce very seriously. We regularly test for legionella out of abundance of caution and have a comprehensive industry-leading water-quality management process that includes steps to take if legionella bacteria are found."

However, according to the CDC, "There is no known safe level of *Legionella* in building water systems. Cases of Legionnaires' disease have been associated with very low levels of *Legionella* in building water systems."

In 2018 two cases of Legionnaires' were found among contractors working on a Wayne State University construction site. There were 32 Legionnaires' related deaths in Michigan in 2018, a 14 percent increase. There were 633 confirmed cases in 2018, a 67 percent increase from 2017.

Legionnaires' bacteria caused at least 10 deaths in

Flint, Michigan, in 2014 in the midst of the water crisis.

In December 2017, the WSWS reported that the *Legionella* bacteria was found at the Ford Kansas City Assembly plant. The testing followed the hospitalization of a Ford Kansas City Assembly worker who contracted Legionnaires' disease and had been placed in a medically induced coma.

At the time Ford downplayed the significance of the finding and insisted there would be no suspension of production while the matter was being investigated. The worker survived, but suffered serious complications.

Ford's Kansas City plant had at least six confirmed cases of Legionnaires' disease in a period of three years. The family of Ford employee Gary Copenhaver, who died of Legionnaires' in 2016, has blamed Ford for his death. They said there was no other location where he could have contracted the disease, however Ford denied his workers compensation claim. According to health officials about 30 percent of Legionnaires' cases in the Clay County area are connected to the Kansas City Assembly plant.

According to *Business Insider*, *Legionella* was found in three locations at Dearborn Truck, including two bathrooms and a medical department. The Rouge facility in Dearborn, Michigan, is the largest Ford-owned complex in the world and is the main manufacturer of the F-150. Any disruption to the production at this plant would cause issues nationwide.

As of yet there have not been any publicly reported illnesses caused by the findings at the Rouge complex. However, management and the UAW have every incentive to conceal such findings.

As workers know, the joint UAW-Ford committee on health and safety is a sham. The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* calls for rank-and-file committees independent of the union to take control of safety and health concerns. The UAW's lack of any response to the latest health concern is not oversight, rather it demonstrates once again that the union functions as a mouthpiece of management. All management and public health records should be open to full inspection by workers committees.

We encourage Dearborn Truck workers to participate in the upcoming conference call on the 2019 contract: "What autoworkers want in the 2019 contract." Register here for the call, July 11, 7:30 p.m. EDT.



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