

# Massachusetts: Buffalo Wild Wings worker dies after inhaling toxic fumes

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A 32-year-old worker died after inhaling cleaning chemical fumes at a Buffalo Wild Wings restaurant and sports bar in Burlington, Massachusetts on Thursday evening. The worker was identified on Friday as Ryan Baldera by interim Burlington Fire Department Chief Michael Patterson. Baldera was the restaurant's general manager and a new father. Friends and family showed an outpouring of support on social media following the news of his death.

Firefighters responded to a call on Thursday evening from the location, which reported a chemical reaction in the kitchen area and evacuated the establishment after declaring a Tier 1 (lowest response level) hazmat incident. Investigators from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) arrived later and through a joint investigation with the fire department revealed the cause of the chemical reaction to be the interaction between two cleaning agents, Super 8 and Scale Kleen, used together to clean the kitchen floor.

According to press reports, Baldera instructed his fellow workers to leave the area and tried to clean up the chemicals himself. He became nauseated after inhaling the toxic fumes and died after being rushed to the hospital. Eight workers and two patrons were also taken to hospitals after feeling ill, but none are known to have been seriously injured by the fumes.

On Friday, Massachusetts Democratic State Representative Kenneth Gordon wrote on Facebook of Baldera's death: "RIP Ryan Baldera. Who died cleaning up a toxic chemical incident himself while ushering his employees away from the dangerous area. Such a tragedy."

Far from a genuine display of concern for the deadly conditions that broad sections of workers are faced with every day, Rep. Gordon's post is an attempt to cover up and brush aside the Democratic Party's role in creating such conditions after decades of relaxing safety

regulations and cutting back on workplace safety and health programs, including OSHA, in order to benefit corporate profit interests.

Several questions remain unanswered. It is not clear whether the area was properly ventilated, if workers at the Buffalo Wild Wings location had access or knowledge of Safety Data Sheets (SDS) for the cleaning chemicals used at the restaurant, if they had the proper safety training to deal with these chemicals, or if they had safety equipment available in the establishment to protect themselves from injury. If so, did they have enough time or staff levels to access needed safety equipment?

OSHA's 2012 Safety Hazard Communication standard requires that a chemical's manufacturer, distributor or importer provide Safety Data Sheets (SDS) and that employers "must ensure that the SDSs are readily accessible to employees for all hazardous chemicals in their workplace. This may be done in many ways. For example, employers may keep the SDSs in a binder or on computers as long as the employees have immediate access to the information without leaving their work area when needed."

These standards for employers are not laws, however, and are hardly enforceable. Furthermore, the standards themselves allow the chemical corporations themselves, who have their own profit interests, to create the SDS for the chemicals they make and sell.

SDS put out by manufacturer Auto-Chlor for Super 8 (which contains sodium hypochlorite, a highly concentrated form of chlorine) warn against reactions with strong acids, of which Scale Kleen, also made by Auto-Chlor, is composed. However, nowhere in the SDS put out by Auto-Chlor does the manufacturer name specific products it manufactures that should not be used together without the risk of serious harm.

Workers at Buffalo Wild Wings across the US have reported stressful working conditions on the job review

website indeed.com, including short staffing during busy times of day, being forced to work far longer hours than originally scheduled, and complain of being insufficiently trained. All of these conditions are increasingly faced by workers across all industries and have contributed to increasing numbers of workplace deaths and injuries over the past decade.

The Buffalo Wild Wings restaurant chain is owned by private holding company Inspire Brands, formerly Arby's Restaurant Group, which owns Buffalo Wild Wings, Arby's, Jimmy John's, Sonic, and Rusty Taco fast food restaurants across the globe.

Inspire is not required to publicly report its annual profits, but its global operations most likely bring in billions of dollars of revenue each year off the backs of a hyper-exploited global workforce. Its CEO Paul J. Brown is most recently estimated to have a net worth of nearly \$2 million as of 2017, exponentially higher than any of the employees at Inspire's restaurants, who toil at minimal wages for long hours in part-time jobs.

There is more than enough wealth held by this global corporation to ensure that workers have access to a safe workplace with adequate safety training and staff levels but cutting back on these necessities is a part of the company's profit scheme.

Workers in the service industry, such as retail and restaurant workers, are some of the lowest-paid workers in the US and in many other countries, with few benefits and job protections. Across the globe, service workers are increasingly coming into struggle against the capitalist profit system and join a growing wave of industrial workers, teachers and students who are ready to fight for better working conditions and living standards against the worldwide system of corporate exploitation.

The right to decent wages, free healthcare benefits and a safe workplace free from risk of death and serious injury must be fought for by workers around the world. The capitalist system, and all of its agents in the pro-corporate political parties and government organizations, are incapable of providing these basic rights to the working class.



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