

Ford workers complain of extreme temperatures in Chicago plants amid record-setting freeze

A WSWWS reporting team
15 November 2019

Workers at Chicago Ford Assembly Plant in Chicago and Chicago Ford Stamping Plant in Chicago Heights, Illinois complained of extreme variations of the temperature in the plants earlier this week as record low temperatures swept across the Midwestern US. Workers complained that some parts of the plants were bitterly cold while others were overheated.

Chicago reached an official record-breaking low of seven degrees Fahrenheit for the date on Tuesday night with wind chills below zero degrees. Two deaths in the city related to the unseasonably cold temperatures have been reported since the beginning of the month.

At Ford's Chicago Assembly Plant on the city's south side, workers remarked on social media that they were able to see their breath in some areas of the plant while they were working. Others said that they could not feel their fingers and noted that heaters in some areas were barely working.

On Tuesday, a worker told the WSWWS *Autoworker Newsletter* that the conditions were "very dangerous" and other workers had complained and went "to medical leave."

Workers in Zones B, C, and D reported cold conditions. Another worker said that the plant was very cold at night. "It's really cold right now," he said. "I'm in the warmest part of the plant, and it's only going to get colder."

The plant is very unevenly heated, according to the workers. While others froze, some workers sweltered in other sections of the facility with excessive heat from vents blowing directly above them. Workers complain of the vents being poorly placed.

The bitterly cold weather affected teachers in Chicago Public Schools, whose strike was just cut short by the

Chicago Teachers Union, only to return to freezing classrooms with broken heating systems and a tentative agreement backed by the CTU, which addressed none of the conditions in the schools against which they had fought.

At the nearby Chicago Stamping Plant, Ford has dragged its feet and waited the entire year to repair and install new heaters. One worker commented, "They finally got around to buying new heaters, but not all units have been installed. They installed all of the ones they bought for the docks, but there are still units that need repairs or replacement.

"They've always relied on these high bay presses [space heaters that emit heat downward from where they are placed near the ceilings] to generate heat, but now 50 percent of high bay is not running, so there's less heat.

"The United Auto Workers, by the way, only "threatens" [management] when they need a sound bite to make themselves look good. It's all about money and we're their last concern," the worker said.

The exposure of these conditions takes place as the UAW is in the final stages of pushing through another sellout agreement that will sanction the closing of plants, the purging of higher paid veteran workers, the expansion of temporary and contract labor and electronic monitoring that will lead to speedup and unsafe conditions.

Autoworkers at the Chicago Assembly Plant voted down the agreement last week.

Through the cutting back of health and safety measures in contract after contract, the UAW has demonstrated that it is nothing more than an enforcer for corporate management. By skirting safety measures

and refusing to pay for necessary repairs and installation of new equipment, the company and union have risked the lives and limbs of workers to boost corporate profit.

For the rights of workers, including to safe working conditions, to take precedence, workers must build new organizations, rank-and-file factory committees, independent of the company-controlled UAW, to vigilantly defend their interests. These committees must fight for the ever-greater expansion of industrial democracy against the corporate-union shop floor dictatorship, including workers' control of production, line speed and health and safety.



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