

As COVID-19 spreads at Toledo Jeep and other plants

Build rank-and-file safety committees at every workplace to save lives!

The FCA Jefferson North, Sterling Heights, Toledo Jeep Rank-and-File Safety Committees
18 July 2020

The number of COVID-19 infections is rising all across the US, and emergency action has to be taken.

At the Toledo Jeep Assembly Complex, more than 40 workers have tested positive for coronavirus as of Monday, and the real number is being covered up by Fiat Chrysler and the United Auto Workers. There are dozens of cases at the General Motors plants in Arlington, Texas, and Wentzville, Missouri, and six workers at the GM plant in Silao, Mexico, have died. More than 130 cases have been reported at Tesla's plant in Fremont, California.

COVID-19 cases in Ohio are on the rise, with 1,700 new cases Friday alone, 89 in the Toledo area. Michigan infections have doubled since June. Many more deaths are not far behind.

Management's safety protocols are 100 percent bogus. In many plants, it is not even feasible to be two feet apart, let alone six feet apart. They did just enough to get us back to work. They wanted the media to think they were trying to stop the spread of the virus, but they are doing the bare minimum. They don't tell us anything. We get information by communicating with each other.

Workers must take matters into their own hands to enforce safety. Safety committees, controlled by ourselves, should have final say if it is safe enough to work.

The rank-and-file safety committees at Jefferson North, Sterling Heights and the Toledo Jeep assembly plants call for infected plants to be closed until they are thoroughly cleaned, and a safe working environment guaranteed. All workers must receive regular testing.

We have raised the following additional demands:

1. Workers must be immediately notified of any cases of COVID-19 and what areas were affected. This information cannot be kept secret from workers.

2. When there's a case confirmed, the factory should be closed for at least 24 hours for deep cleaning, not just the affected area, but the whole plant. Preventative maintenance is needed to ensure a safe and comfortable working environment.

3. All workers who test positive must have paid leave for the duration of their illness.

4. Social distancing must be implemented when entering and leaving the plant and during bathroom, lunch and other break times. Disinfectant and cleaning equipment will remain readily available for workers to use as they see fit.

5. All equipment will be cleaned on every break by a separate cleaning crew, who will have cleaning equipment, follow social distancing guidelines, wear masks and be compensated for their labor by the company. FCA employees are not responsible for cleaning equipment, nor for paying the cleaning crew.

6. Trained medical personnel, independent of management, must be present in every plant, reporting directly to safety committees on conditions.

7. The line must be stopped for 10 minutes every hour to enable workers to take off their masks, rest and cool off. If a worker has underlying health issues, which prevent them from being able to wear a mask in the plant,

they should be able to either wear a face shield or be guaranteed a job back after the pandemic, with full pay in the meantime.

8. Workers must have regular, universal testing, with results returned within 24 hours. Temperature checks and self-reporting symptoms are not enough.

9. If conditions are not safe, workers have the right to refuse to work without threat of retaliation by management and the union.

10. Workers will not be targeted, reprimanded, terminated or otherwise harassed for taking time off to wait for test results. Reinstate any terminated employees immediately who have been fired for taking days off to get tested. No retribution for using FMLA to deal with family health and mental health issues.

The politicians and corporate executives who say “let’s get back to normal” are only looking to protect their investments. They’re flat out lying when they claim there’s not enough money for better safety, universal testing, or shutdowns to stop the virus. The companies and their stockholders have gotten hundreds of billions of dollars in government handouts.

They simply don’t care about the well-being of the workers. Our lives can’t be kept hostage to profits.

No one else will fight for us. The unions are not for us. We can’t rely on them to keep us safe, so we have to do it ourselves.

It is not just autoworkers who are being mistreated and having their lives put on the line. There are multitudes of workers going through the same fight. Millions of teachers face a nightmare this fall as the government tries to force open the schools and put our children in harm’s way, all so they can keep workers working and keep the rich getting richer.

It is not just certain workers in this struggle. It is a global situation. Our brothers and sisters in Mexico are being told by the companies that they have to get sick and die to keep production going too. Hundreds of workers and their family members at the Mexican oil company PEMEX have died. We must wage a united fight across borders.

We call on all workers—including autoworkers,

educators, meatpacking workers, retail and service workers, logistics workers and airline workers—to build rank-and-file safety committees. Workers in essential jobs must have PPE, regular testing and safe conditions.

It is up to all workers to get on the same page and work together to fight this pandemic. The unions won’t do it. Governors like Gretchen Whitmer in Michigan won’t do it. They even want to reopen the schools, which would threaten the lives of millions of students and teachers. It is up to workers to defend ourselves.

With the pandemic taking more lives every day, action is urgent.

Share this statement with your coworkers and discuss our demands! Join our new Facebook group, the Ford/GM/Chrysler Rank-and-File Safety Committee Network, to share information and coordinate with workers at other plants. Form a rank-and-file safety committee at your workplace, join us and take up the fight.

For help starting a rank-and-file safety committee at your factory, send an email to the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter at autoworkers@wsws.org to learn more.



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