

Auto parts worker dies at Michigan Faurecia plant of unexplained causes

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The sudden death of a Michigan auto parts worker has touched off an angry response among coworkers. Management has not released the cause of death, but coronavirus, which has spread throughout the facility, is widely suspected.

Damian Jones worked at Faurecia's giant parts plant in Saline, Michigan, just west of Detroit. He drove a tug delivering parts to different lines and workstations around the plant. In his late thirties or early forties, he was well-known and well-liked, and dozens of posts in sympathy and sadness have flooded the company Facebook page since his death.

"Work isn't the same without you," one wrote three days ago. "You touched a lot of people. This isn't goodbye. It's a, 'See you later,' my friend." There were emojis of broken hearts and gushing tears. Another wrote, "So sad to hear of a fellow UAW, PC&L brother ... run those tugs and Hilo's in his honor today."

The primary concern of management remains reducing absenteeism to maintain production. Meanwhile, the company continues to work its employees to the point of exhaustion. In order to maintain production in the face of skyrocketing absenteeism, some workers are being forced to work seven 12-hour shifts, or 84 hours every week.

By the time of this writing, the United Auto Workers union reportedly still has not spoken to his family or released the cause of his death. Many workers knew him personally and would be directly at risk if the cause of death was indeed coronavirus.

Several workers contacted the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* to tell us about his death and the conditions in the plant. "We don't know how he died," said a nightshift worker. "They won't tell us anything. They don't care."

"We get a regular little paper mask," she continued. "The hilo drivers and tug drivers just wear a mask and glasses. The workers on the line have to wear a mask and a face shield. It is really hot in the plant and you are sweating in the mask. It's terrible."

She denounced the supervisors for staying in their sanitized and air conditioned offices while conditions on the factory floor are deplorable. "They are not disinfecting," she said. "Management are all completely safe up in the office. We are out in the plant. They don't do any deep cleaning, just so everybody knows. There is no deep cleaning going on."

There have been multiple confirmed cases of coronavirus in different locations throughout the plant. Two workers have tested positive on the Jeep line at different times, two in the medium press area, one on the F-150 line and one in the department called 552.

"They don't call everyone," said a worker on afternoons. "Some people get a call when there is a positive test, some don't."

One post from Facebook gives an indication of the growing anger among workers. "I see these posts about positive people on JL(Jeep Line) and who got contacted. But my question is, 'Why hasn't the whole plant been contacted?'

"This [disease] is airborne. We walk through these areas, use bathrooms and work ... We as coworkers and union brothers and sisters have to stand together. They don't give a shit about us."

"They want their parts. Who cares if we die? They will replace us before the shift is over. Wake up people! Why do you think that they keep offering us these bonuses? Just pay attention to our supervisors. They are in the fishbowl (air-conditioned office) and letting the Gap leader run the show."

A worker on days told the *Autoworker Newsletter*,

“They have us all working seven days. They say we have clean work stations, but when you work in there, there are none!”

“Another thing they claim is that there is a six foot rule for social distancing. There is no six foot rule. We have to work right on top of each other. There’s already five confirmed cases. They don’t give a damn about us.”

Last summer, the United Auto Workers union imposed a sellout contract after an eight hour Hollywood strike. Now, it is colluding with the company to impose speed-up and massive overtime under conditions of the deadly spread of the coronavirus.

“Under the contract they can’t make us do 12 hours, but we work that anyway,” another worker said. “We know there were cases on the Jeep line, IT, and the front door line. We don’t find out from the UAW or the company. They don’t tell you anything. Brothers and sisters on the line tell you what happened and where.”

Like many workers who spoke with the *Autoworker Newsletter*, she said the situation is reaching the breaking point. “People are scared, stressed and frustrated risking their lives. Seven days a week is getting to them. There’s 300 call offs a day. What does that tell you? When we opened there was 400 people that didn’t come back.”

The conditions are unbearable. “They keep trying to hire people, and they work for a week,” she said. “The roof is still falling apart, leaking. When it rains outside, it rains inside. We have janitorial staff come in to change the trash, but the bathrooms are dirty and disgusting. It’s the same shape, they put no money into the plant. That money they got from the stimulus, where did it go? Nothing is fixed. We need to make things better right now!”

Social media and word of mouth are the main means that workers have to find out about positive cases and begin to organize themselves to fight the virus.

For example, a worker explained a dangerous situation on Facebook to alert his co-workers. “I made a post Friday about my father testing positive. Well earlier today I got confirmation that my sister who lives with him and her two kids and my stepmom, they all tested positive with the exception of my nephew.

“I notified my superior and will be contacting HR and medical Monday morning. I am getting tested because I

was holding my three-year-old niece and playing with her. I have not been back to work since I made my last post. I’m just letting everyone know and when my results come back after I get tested I’ll let everyone know.”

Autoworkers throughout the country have already formed rank-and-file safety committees to oppose the dangerous conditions imposed jointly by management and the UAW. For help setting up a committee at your own workplace, contact the *Autoworker Newsletter* at autoworkers@wsws.org.



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