

Ford Dearborn Truck Plant workers launch rank-and-file safety committee to save lives amid COVID-19 pandemic

The Ford Dearborn Truck Rank-and-File Safety Committee
1 August 2020

Autoworkers at the Ford Rouge Complex in Dearborn, Michigan have organized a rank-and-file safety committee in solidarity with their brothers and sisters at FCA Jefferson North in Detroit, Sterling Heights Assembly north of Detroit and the FCA Toledo Jeep plant in northwest Ohio. The committee's first act was to issue the following appeal to its 5,000 co-workers, who build the company's most popular F-150 pickup trucks, to prepare joint action to fight the coronavirus and to save lives.

Ford Rouge brothers and sisters: We face a dire emergency. The coronavirus is spreading among us. It's on this line. It's on that line. It is coming to you. Management, with the support of the union, treat us like guinea pigs and we are reaching the breaking point.

These are the facts:

- There are at least 11 cases that we know of. But we don't know for sure because they don't tell us anything. There was a positive case on the Engine Line last Sunday. Recently, a supervisor in the plant became ill. He was working on at least two lines in close contact with many people.

Meanwhile, the virus continues to spread at other plants. There are 40 cases at FCA's Toledo Jeep plant. Half of night shift in the body shop at Chicago Assembly did not show up Thursday because one worker tested positive for the virus.

- Management's policies do nothing to stop the spread of the virus. The conditions in the plant violate every safety precaution. Because so many people, out of fear for their lives and those of their families, are not coming in, the company is doubling up on jobs to keep the line running. We are working in very close quarters, touching the same parts and brushing shoulders to pass

one another.

The temperature checks are worse than useless. Even if you have the disease, you don't necessarily have a fever and will not show any symptoms for several days. That means the safeguard that management has touted as the solution is worse than worthless. It's not scientific, it is just a public relations gimmick. Meanwhile, the state of sanitation in the plant is deplorable.

- In Michigan, there are more than 80,000 confirmed cases, and the virus is making a comeback. There were 996 new cases confirmed this past Wednesday and another 715 on Thursday. At least 6,191 Michiganders have already died from the disease.

Only five short months ago there were only a handful of cases in the United States. Now there are 4 million. That shows you how fast the disease can escalate. Our lives and those of our family members are in danger!

Medical experts overwhelmingly insist on testing, contact tracing, isolation and social distancing to fight the disease. But despite their claims to the contrary, these crucial measures have been abandoned by every level of company management as well as the government, because for them, profits are more important than our lives and those of our children.

They punish us for developing symptoms by making us sit home for 14 days without pay. If you don't recover, you get left out in the dust.

The new protocol, that in order to be considered exposed we have to be within 6 feet of an infected person for 15 minutes, doesn't make any sense. We are in the bathroom, the break room, the cafeteria and the virus could be circulating in the air throughout the plant.

The United Auto Workers (UAW) is working with the company and both are lying through their teeth. They don't care about us. They forced us back to work before the pandemic was under control for no other reason than to protect the big stock holders.

Ford management and the UAW are more worried about keeping the line running than they are about the health and safety of us the workers and our families. Our brothers and sisters are falling sick, and we never know the truth. Who is sick? Who has died? Have we been exposed?

The union is blaming the workers. They are saying Ford can fire people for not following the protocol. The recent bulletin from the desk of UAW plant president Burkie Morris said as little as possible. They do not want any type of dispute.

We can see them not reporting cases, trying to cover them up, keeping everybody in the dark. Then they give us a leaflet on the way out the door. The UAW has done nothing except to work with management to keep us on the line. We are working 10.7 hours, which is the maximum we can work under the contract. The union is giving them the green light.

As long as the UAW has control, it is not going to get better. It's going to get worse.

Therefore, we ourselves **MUST TAKE A STAND!**

We have **NINE** demands which are **NON-NEGOTIABLE**:

1. All workers must be immediately notified of any cases of COVID-19 and all areas that are 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 and daily sanitizing is vital to ensure a safe and comfortable working environment.

3. Social distancing must be implemented at all times—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.

4. 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. Ford employees are not responsible for cleaning equipment, nor for paying the cleaning crew.

5. 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 him or her from being able to wear a mask in the plant, he or she should be able to either wear a face shield or be guaranteed a job back after the pandemic, with full pay in the meantime.

6. Workers must have regular, universal testing. Temperature checks and self-reporting symptoms are just so much PR.

7. **WHENEVER** conditions are not safe, we have the right to refuse to work without any threat of retaliation by management or the union.

8. We will not be targeted, written up, terminated or harassed in any way for taking time off to get tested and get results. Any worker terminated or sent home for taking days off to get tested must be reinstated with no loss of pay. No one can be punished for using FMLA to deal with family health and mental health issues.

9. The misuse and abuse of the temporary and supplemental workers has to stop. The blatant violation of our work hours and schedules has to stop. They are working the same hours and they should have the same benefits.

If you agree with these demands, **JOIN US!** Spread the word!

If you work at different plants, form rank-and-file safety committees of your own! Help us build the network at every plant! **STOP THE VIRUS!! SAVE LIVES!!!**

The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter will assist autoworkers and other workers in establishing safety committees. Email the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter at autoworkers@wsws.org.



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