

GM Spring Hill workers speak out against unsafe conditions amid COVID-19 pandemic

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Workers at General Motors' Spring Hill Manufacturing plant in Spring Hill, Tennessee, recently spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* on the impact of COVID-19 and the conditions under which workers are forced to operate.

Spring Hill sits on the Williamson and Maury county line and is considered part of the Nashville metropolitan area. Nashville, located in Davidson County, has the second highest case count and death toll in Tennessee, after Shelby County (Memphis), with 20,001 cases and 211 deaths. Williamson County, for its part, has 3,405 cases and 25 deaths, while Maury County has nearly 1,200 cases and 7 deaths.

On August 6, Tennessee recorded its highest single-day death total, at 42. Statewide, as of this writing, there are over 116,000 cases and almost 1,200 deaths.

In response to the overall economic crisis due to the pandemic, which has led to a collapse in auto sales, General Motors announced on June 24 that it planned to lay off 680 workers and eliminate the third shift at its Spring Hill facility. The United Auto Workers (UAW), while "heartbroken," in the words of outgoing Local 1853 Chairman Mike Herron, made no effort to oppose the layoffs, accepting them as part of doing business.

The UAW is in the midst of a vast corruption scandal. New details have emerged in the form of a court filing by GM alleging that Fiat Chrysler provided tens of millions of dollars in bribes to UAW officials.

General Motors began reopening its Spring Hill plant in late May. Its second shift returned to work on June 1, and just over a week later workers were reporting an end to any efforts to make social distancing possible and an abandonment by the company of its sanitation protocols.

When workers were ordered back to work, they were told that sanitation would occur multiple times

throughout the day, but by June 10 it was down to once per shift and once after a shift. Since then, conditions at the plant have only worsened.

The WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* has received comments from a number of workers at the plant. One worker wrote, "Crazy here. Now they [management and the union] aren't even telling us [about potential outbreaks]. People have been posting themselves so as not to infect others." While unsure of the total number of cases at the plant, she wrote, "I think there have been 14 cases that we know of," adding, "Sanitizing is a joke."

Echoing these comments, another worker said, "Yeah, people have been seen throwing up and no cleaning was done. Not being told numbers of cases. People constantly being sent out on quarantine."

"I've been in my new area since July 28, and I have not seen any cleaning happening except for the bathrooms. Whole teams are being sent out of the plant and we're not told anything. I had to get tested because of a sore throat, upset stomach and low fever. My test came back negative, but people are complaining of sore throats and stomach issues and throwing up, yet no cleaning is being seen."

While the company has mandated masks for its workers, the heat and lack of proper ventilation in the plant have made wearing them unbearable. "Your mask is soaked wet with sweat so bad by the first hour you feel like you just got out of a shower," the worker reported.

When asked about the campaign to reopen the economy, she wrote, "I understand people need to work and businesses need to be open to survive. However, it's spreading like crazy at work, at schools and in the public."

"Had the government not rushed to reopen so quickly

it would have stopped. Had they just been patient for say 30–45 more days with a quarantine, we wouldn't be forced into working and cases popping up all around us. I think they are putting lives in jeopardy. Every human being is just a number and if there are more casualties, then it's just okay to them.

“So do people feel safe at this plant? I'd say no! Yeah, we have temp checked and use hand sanitizer, but why are people still getting sick and throwing up, and having sore throats, diarrhea, etc.?”

Describing the response of the UAW to the conditions at the plant, she stated, “Their response fails!!!! UAW says they are fighting for our safety, but actually in the plant and on the floor... different ballgame.”



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