

Stop the UAW-management cover-up of COVID-19 in the auto plants!

The Autoworker Rank-and-File Safety Committee Network
1 September 2020

The Autoworker Rank-and-File Safety Committee Network is a national organization of workers throughout the auto industry who have organized to oppose the unsafe return to work by the auto companies and the United Auto Workers. Email the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter at autoworkers@wsws.org to learn more and get involved today.

The Autoworker Rank-and-File Safety Committee Network demands an end to the outrageous cover-up by management and their UAW accomplices of the spread of COVID-19 cases in the auto plants.

Last week, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), under pressure from the viciously anti-worker Trump administration, issued new guidelines stating that people exposed to the coronavirus who do not yet show symptoms “do not necessarily” need to be tested, even as COVID-19 continues to spread throughout our workplaces and communities.

The Detroit automakers told the *Detroit Free Press* that they are not going to follow the relaxed CDC rules and will still require testing for those exposed to the virus. They must think workers are idiots.

It’s becoming common knowledge that those exposed to the virus in the plants are not being notified by management or the UAW, let alone tested. It’s an outright scandal that the companies and the unions make less and less of an attempt to hide.

The limited safety measures they promised following the restart in May are being systematically eliminated as they try to get us to build more vehicles. Workers at Jefferson North Assembly (JNAP) and other Fiat Chrysler plants have been notified that even the extra five minutes added to breaks for cleaning and social distancing are being eliminated.

The auto companies are seeking to wash their hands

of any responsibility to protect our health and safety.

Ford has announced it is launching a “massive” health and safety campaign based entirely on shifting the responsibility onto workers to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Their end game is to blame us for our own illnesses and deaths that they should’ve prevented.

The company wants workers and their families to sign a contract pledging to adhere to a list of “safe practices” at home, including wearing facemasks and regular hand washing, with an additional pledge for parents and guardians.

Management claims signing the pledge is voluntary, but we don’t believe that. This kind of thing has a dark and ugly history. Henry Ford had his notorious “Sociological Department” that tried to monitor the living conditions and “morals” of Ford workers. We must not accept this attempt to reestablish the methods of industrial dictatorship!

The situation requires urgent action. In recent days, it has come to our attention that workers at several plants who were in contact with infected co-workers on their team have not been informed and not asked to self-quarantine. Guards at JNAP are often letting workers into the plant without checking the COVID questionnaires or checking the thermal scan. Disinfectant bottles for cleaning were empty for weeks.

At the FCA Toledo Jeep complex, no fewer than three workers on one team had tested positive for COVID-19, but management failed to inform the rest of the team.

At the same time, Fiat Chrysler management has issued a warning to workers that if they expose such unsafe practices via social media they could face termination.

The newly formed rank-and-file safety committee at the Faurecia Gladstone parts plant in Columbus,

Indiana, reports that a gap leader was left on the floor for five days waiting for test results after she reported being exposed to COVID and even had symptoms. After the worker tested positive, she was sent home without pay. Management lied by saying the worker was in “self-quarantine.”

These go against basic health protocols that require the entire team be sent home to self-quarantine for 14 days if even one team member tests positive for COVID-19.

The committee has learned of similar horror stories at other factories.

These criminal practices must end now! Workers deserve nothing less than full accountability and all information necessary to preserve our health and safety.

The Autoworker Rank-and-File Safety Committee Network not only demands serious adherence to safety protocols. We reject any suggestion that the responsibility for maintaining safe conditions is primarily the responsibility of workers. What has been demonstrated again and again is that management values their cars more than the lives of us, the workers.

The safety protocols now in place are totally inadequate. This committee demands:

- All workers must be immediately notified when there are new COVID-19 cases and all areas and shifts that are affected. The companies must keep a total count of positive COVID-19 cases, updated in real time, that is easily accessible by workers. This information cannot be kept secret from us.

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

- All equipment must 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. Workers are not responsible for cleaning equipment, nor for paying the cleaning crew.

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

- 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.

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

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

- Workers must 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.

We call on all autoworkers and auto parts workers in North America, including our brothers and sisters in Canada and Mexico, to follow our example and construct rank-and-file safety committees to work together to fight this pandemic. Our lives are more important than corporate profits.

This is not just a fight by autoworkers. All workers whether teachers, meatpackers, Amazon workers, truckers or airline workers must unite together. The unions will not do this. The big business politicians, Democrats and Republicans won't do this. It is up to us to stand up and defend our lives.



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