

New cluster of COVID-19 hits Faurecia Gladstone factory in Columbus, Indiana

Tim Rivers
16 October 2020

Multiple new coronavirus infections have been confirmed over the space of just a few days at a crucial auto parts manufacturing plant in Columbus, Indiana provoking widespread anger and calls by workers for the total shutdown of the facility to allow for deep cleaning.

The Faurecia Gladstone plant provides exhaust systems that go in most major vehicle and equipment lines, including Dodge, Ford, GM, John Deere and Cummins. News of the outbreak began to hit the shop floor after a forklift driver, whose job requires her to move throughout the plant, took her father to the hospital on Sunday to be tested. Both tested positive and were hospitalized immediately. When she posted her story to Facebook, the news spread like wildfire among her co-workers at Gladstone.

Workers are speaking out in defiance of the continuing efforts by both the company and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) to intimidate them and suppress information about the spread of the deadly disease. The company, with the support of the union, is determined to maintain production so as to preserve the company's position in the global supply chain.

Workers demanded to know how many active cases there are in the plant. However, the company refused to disclose this essential information. Workers were able to determine independently that three pack mule drivers who also move parts throughout the facility had also tested positive. To make matters worse, a supervisor was also reported to have tested positive for the virus.

"They are trying to half-ass it," a worker reported to the *World Socialist Web Site*. He was furious that the company had refused to shut down production and sanitize the plant. "They are trying to lie to everybody at Gladstone to keep us coming to work," he said.

"They just don't care about anybody."

The word on the shop floor is that another half a dozen employees have contracted the virus at the same time, but the workers do not yet have confirmation of these cases, and the company cannot be trusted to provide information.

"They need to shut the place down for two weeks," the worker continued. "All they want is their parts."

Workers come to work every day, knowing that they are risking not just their own lives of their loved ones. "If I get it, my father or my cousin may die," the worker concluded.

The company makes a pretense of safety precautions with split-second temperature checks and mask-wearing regulations.

The reality, however, is all too clear. When the washbasin in the factory was out of order earlier during the week, plant managers were indifferent to workers' complaints and told them to use the hand sanitizer instead. "But when your hands are dirty," a worker told us, "hand sanitizer is useless."

Last month, the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* published a statement by the Faurecia Gladstone Rank-and-File Safety Committee, which was founded over the summer to oppose unsafe working conditions, demanding the shutdown of the plant for cleaning. "The virus is spreading uncontrollably through the plant and workers are increasingly angered because cases are being concealed by the union and the company and various sections of the workforce that have been exposed are being forced to work without sterilizing the shop or being provided proper protection from the contagion," the committee said. Events this week have shown that in the four weeks since then the situation has become much worse.

There are staffing shortages on nearly all production

lines after the company terminated more than 200 workers in March during the industry shutdown. Workers are being forced to make up for manpower shortages through a brutal regime of forced overtime and seven-day work weeks. Many workers labor for 84 hours each week.

Workers were surprised on Sunday when the bathrooms were shut down for two hours to be powerwashed. The company gave no explanation. Many speculate that the incident was related to the outbreak in the plant.

Faurecia responded to this latest horrific outbreak by beginning to implement testing on Wednesday, but only upon workers' individual requests. One worker responded, "Now all of a sudden, they have started jerking people up there and giving them tests. What have they been doing for the last six months?"

Workers at Faurecia Gladstone are being worked past the point of exhaustion. Although workers have filed numerous complaints with government regulatory agencies, including OSHA, nothing has been done. Indeed, OSHA has issued only 30 coronavirus-related citations nationwide out of a total of 9,000 complaints.

To oppose this homicidal policy, rank-and-file workers must organize themselves independently. The Faurecia Gladstone Rank-and-File Safety Committee is part of a network of committees in plants across the country which are organizing the fight against unsafe conditions. We call on Gladstone workers to join the Committee by writing to the link below.

To join the Rank-and-File Safety Committee at your plant, or for assistance in establishing a Committee, contact the World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter at autoworkers@wsws.org.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact