

Auto parts worker crushed by massive manufacturing mold at plant north of Detroit

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13 November 2020

On Tuesday, November 10, a 42-year-old worker in suburban Detroit, David Spano, was crushed to death by a 25,000-pound manufacturing mold. The fatal incident occurred at Romeo RIM, an automotive parts plant in Romeo, Michigan, located in Macomb County directly north of Detroit.

According to the Bruce Township Fire Department, which was contacted around 10 am that morning and promptly arrived on the scene, responders found Spano beneath the 12-and-a-half-ton mold, which appeared to have fallen on top of him from an interior wall of the plant. Fire Chief David Witgen stated that it seemed that Spano's death was instantaneous. The Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) is aware of the incident, and authorities said that it "appears to be a tragic accident."

The mold apparently was used primarily for the production of bus bumpers. It's unclear at this point how long Spano had worked at the plant or whether or not Spano was properly trained in recognizing hazardous situations at work. Plants like Romeo RIM typically employ large numbers of contract workers.

On its website, Romeo Rim calls itself "the world's innovative leader in custom reaction injection molding and composite solutions." The company's customers include government entities and other companies from various industries including transportation, trucking, construction, agriculture, spa, and rail car assembly.

Romeo RIM generates annual revenue of \$38 million and has a relatively small workforce. The company's main plant, where the fatal accident occurred, employs roughly 200 people.

Deaths on the job are a regular, tragic occurrence in Michigan and nationally. Between 2016 and 2019, an average of 157 workplace fatalities occurred in Michigan each year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). In 2018, the last year for which the BLS has

statistics available, there were 5,250 fatal workplace injuries across the US and 155 in Michigan.

The president and CEO of Romeo RIM, Tim Howell, said that the company will cooperate with all investigations into the accident. In a statement regarding the accident, Howell said, "We will be working diligently to review and reinforce the safety procedures we follow and to check and double-check our equipment. We want to know exactly what happened and we want to be sure nothing like this happens again."

However, accidents and deaths are all too regular occurrences due to the subordination of all productive activity to the profit drive of the corporations, which view safety standards as a potential drain on investors.

As for the role of government regulatory bodies like MIOSHA, these toothless and vastly underfunded agencies work essentially to cover up for management crimes. For example, at Challenge Manufacturing in Holland, Michigan on December 2017, a worker, Scott Teusink, age 56, died after a 5,000 pound steel coil fell on him. The company was notorious for poor safety practices and unsafe conditions. MIOSHA eventually levied a \$7,000 fine against the company, the largest fine allowed by law. Management appealed even this derisory amount and MIOSHA lowered it to \$4,200. Such outrages are all too common.

Another noxious example of this principle has been demonstrated in the general response by business to the COVID-19 pandemic. In late March, when many states were issuing lockdown orders that temporarily shut down much non-essential production, businesses were rushing to apply for "essential" status so that they can remain open, even if their businesses, like auto, produce consumer goods that are not needed for survival.

The lockdown orders themselves were a haphazard response by state governments to widespread anger within the working class over the indifference of the ruling class

to the pandemic. This was expressed in wildcat strikes in the automotive industry, such as to work stoppages that took place literally down the street from Romeo RIM, at Fiat Chrysler plants in Warren and Sterling Heights, Michigan.

Despite the uncontrolled spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the entire manufacturing sector of industry has been in full operation since the middle of May. In July, supplemental unemployment benefits expired for millions of workers across the country who were laid off due to the shut down of facilities or a reduction in the workforce this spring.

Workers were herded back into factories and warehouses, which have become vectors for the spread of COVID-19. A recent report from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that adults who work in an office or a factory were twice as likely to test positive for the coronavirus than those who worked from home. The primary method of COVID-19 infection for workers who work from home can also be reduced to sharing a household with one or more individuals who do not work from home.

Meanwhile, management and unions like the United Autoworkers have covered up COVID-19 infections and deaths in the plants. Workers have often had to find out about a co-worker's positive test for COVID-19 through social media.

MIOSHA has received 3,800 complaints from employees and 263 referrals from local governments alleging failure to observe safe practices relating to the threat of COVID-19 spreading at workplaces. However, MIOSHA has responded by issuing citations only in several dozens of cases, and those mostly only during the past two months.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* urges workers to contact us about building a rank-and-file safety committee at your workplace to protect workers' lives. Join the growing network of workplace safety committees being built in opposition to the corporations and pro-management unions.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact