

Faurecia auto parts workers join calls for national shutdown to stop the spread of COVID-19 and save lives

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To join the Autoworker Rank-and-File Safety Committee network, contact autoworkers@wsws.org.

Auto parts workers from multiple states have joined the call for a shutdown of the industry nationwide to contain the coronavirus and save the lives of tens of thousands who are currently threatened by the raging pandemic.

Workers at the Faurecia plant in Saline, Michigan, southwest of Detroit, contacted the *World Socialist Web Site* over the weekend to expose the way in which their company suppresses information about the spread of disease at the sprawling factory, where approximately 2,000 work.

They forwarded a private memo from the plant manager that was sent to the supervisors of four workers who tested positive last week. The memo contained instructions on getting them out of the plant while keeping knowledge of the multiple, simultaneous outbreaks restricted to as few people as possible.

It begins, “Supervisors, Please see below communication to be shared to your teams during TOP5 with your area.” (“TOP5” refers to a short meeting with a small group.) “In summary, we had 4 confirmed Covid-19 cases amongst our team in Saline,” the plant manager continues. “All employees to be quarantined have been informed and all the cleaning measures were taken. Don’t print this email, just share with them. For any questions they might have, please let me know. Thank you!”

These are unequivocal instructions to prevent the workforce as a whole from finding out about the four simultaneous outbreaks in different parts of the factory, which taken together can only mean that the virus is running rampant throughout the facility.

The areas where the outbreaks occurred include P702 IP, which is a new product line; Shogo and Tesla, which are established production lines; and PC&L, which includes hi-lo drivers and tug drivers who deliver parts all over the plant. While his document indicates that the virus is widespread in the plant, the manager makes clear that there will be no interruption of production. As far as the company is concerned—and it has the full agreement of the United Auto Workers (UAW)—the conditions that produced these four outbreaks will continue.

As an example of the growing scope of the contagion, workers reported that an additional five confirmed cases over the course of multiple weeks on another line that produces for Fiat Chrysler’s Jeep.

The memo includes empty phrases about “preventing the spread” that have been repeated endlessly by companies across the country as they condemn their employees to work in cesspools of COVID-19. “Please take a few minutes to remind your employees on how to manage symptoms,” it concludes, “and ensure they understand the importance of wearing their PPE in the work place in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19.”

Over the weekend, Michigan state health officials admitted that factories and construction sites are critical hotspots feeding an exponential spike in COVID-19 cases and deaths.

Combining confirmed COVID cases with those considered probable, Michigan reached 288,954 total cases on Monday, with 8,431 deaths. This means there is a devastating fatality rate of three deaths for every 100 reported cases. The state also set a record for new infections in each of the past five weeks, reaching a

staggering 44,019 new cases last week. There were 416 deaths in that week, the highest count since early May.

Announcing limited measures to slow the flood of infection, Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer said the grim toll for the state is threatening to rise to 1,000 deaths every week. However, Whitmer specifically excluded industrial sites from her proposed partial lockdown, bowing before the demands of the auto giants to maintain operations and continue pumping out profits.

Workers' anger over the demands they sacrifice their lives for profit is reaching a boiling point. On Saturday, the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant Rank-and-File Safety Committee issued a statement calling for a work stoppage to halt production, with full compensation to affected workers, in order to save lives. The committee called on workers not to return to work until all necessary safety measures have been taken, including daily testing of the entire workforce, full pay for workers under quarantine, the immediate publication of all cases in the plant and an end to company and UAW intimidation against workers who speak out to the media or on Facebook.

"Why is Gretchen Whitmer having a shutdown when she doesn't want to include us in it?" a Faurecia Saline worker demanded to know. "We need to close it all down for four to six weeks to disinfect everything,"

She estimated that five workers have already reportedly succumbed to the virus at the Saline plant, based upon the information workers have been able to compile on their own, despite the blackout maintained by the company and the UAW.

"The companies don't want a shutdown because they are going to lose money," she continued. "Close it down already!" she insisted.

The auto industry was only shut down from late-March to May because of the wildcat strike wave that was initiated by workers who were outraged that production was continuing. By taking the initiative into their own hands in defiance of the UAW, autoworkers were able to save tens of thousands of lives.

"The union is not trying to do anything," the worker from Saline continued. "We need to do something. If it took wildcats to stop it before, then that is what we need to speak up for now."

When the Faurecia Gladstone Rank-and-File Safety Committee at the company's plant in Columbus,

Indiana, heard about the outbreak at their sister plant in Saline, Michigan, they were quick to extend support to the struggle of their brothers and sisters to the north. Gladstone produces exhaust systems for all the big auto companies as well as for heavy equipment manufacturers John Deere and Cummins.

At Gladstone, the union is the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), but the criminal collusion with the company is the same as with the UAW in Saline. Rank-and-file workers have begun compiling their own database of confirmed cases and have documented 35 infections to date, including everyone from line workers to skilled trades, gap leaders, supervisors, fork drivers and a plant engineer.

When he heard about the situation in Saline, a member of the Gladstone Safety Committee told the WSWs, "The companies do not care how many people die. They just want production to keep going. You die. ... They put somebody else in your place.

"The plant is a cesspool of COVID-19," he said. "All the time people are going out with it. We don't know how many have it or who has died."

Autoworkers at final assembly plants, parts plants and throughout the industry must take matters into their own hands, expanding the network of rank-and-file safety committees and fighting for the immediate shutdown of non-essential production with full compensation to workers, small businesses, and the unemployed.

This will require a direct assault on the wealth hoarded by the auto corporations and their investors, who have profited handsomely during the pandemic. The trillions of dollars transferred to Wall Street by both Democrats and Republicans must be redirected to protect both the health and well-being of workers and their families, who created that wealth in the first place.

To fight for this program, join the Rank-and-File Safety Committee network today! Contact the World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter at autoworkers@wsws.org to get involved.



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