

UPS worker dies of injuries at Louisville Worldport facility as holiday package crush begins

Steve Filips
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A United Parcel Service (UPS) worker was killed 4:30 a.m. Wednesday morning at the UPS Worldport Centennial Hub near Louisville, Kentucky. According to the Jefferson County Coroner's office the worker was David A. Platt, 28, of Springfield, Kentucky, and the cause of death was listed as blunt force trauma.

There have been relatively few details of the accident released so far. According to the company the worker was employed as a mechanic to repair sorting equipment at the hub.

The shipping giant UPS has seen volume similar to the holiday season since the coronavirus pandemic struck. There are four million packages sorted at its Worldport hub during the holiday rush, or twice the usual rate. "With the pandemic and with many more people ordering things online and then delivering to homes, we are seeing already an increase in volume and have for several months," said a UPS spokesman, Jim Mayer.

The Centennial Hub is where packages are sorted for ground delivery by package car or shipped by tractor-trailer. It had undergone a \$310 million expansion in 2019, with the company touting the fact that it could now process 85,000 packages per hour.

The workers at Worldport and Centennial Hub are under the jurisdiction of International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 89. The Teamsters have not issued a statement on the accident.

There are over 25,000 UPS workers at Worldport, which is the company's chief air cargo hub in the US. The Centennial sorting facility handled the sorting of packages for local delivery or to be trucked to other destinations. Worldport, at Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport, is ranked as the fourth largest

volume air cargo facility in the world, only behind hubs at Hong Kong, Shanghai and Memphis, Tennessee.

The holiday season brings the challenge of increased package volume and UPS has planned to hire 3,600 part-time workers to meet the demand, but the jobs pay only a poverty-level starting wage of \$14.50 per hour for grueling, backbreaking work.

Logistics workers face considerable dangers on the job. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) annual statistics reports that the trucking and transportation industries ranked among the deadliest in the US, with 2,080 deaths or 40 percent of all workers killed on the job in 2018.

Last November, at the start of the holiday season, two young UPS part-time package handlers in California were killed when their cargo-tugging vehicle overturned at Ontario International airport outside Los Angeles. Posts by UPS workers indicated the two were putting in back-to-back 15-hour days with little chance to rest in between.

In addition to potentially hazardous working conditions there is the threat of the deadly coronavirus. Two UPS employees died from COVID-19 at UPS Worldport earlier this year. Demonstrating its callous disregard for health and safety as a company policy, UPS has refused to confirm cases of COVID-19 or deaths at its facilities.

In May, some 300,000 UPS workers signed an online petition demanding hazard pay during the pandemic. The enormous package volume increases the chance of workplace injury and makes it impossible for workers to socially distance in observance of COVID-related health guidelines.

The surrounding community is seeing rising infection

rates. including at factories and shipping facilities, but exact numbers have not been revealed publically. Kentucky broke its single day record again this week, on Thursday, with 3,649 new cases, and a reported 30 COVID-19 related deaths. The situation in neighboring Indiana was severe as well, with COVID-19 cases reaching 7,420, and 59 deaths. In response, Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear has belatedly closed all schools as of next Monday, and all indoor dining and bars as of this Friday.



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