

Auto parts worker dies of COVID-19-induced heart attack at Faurecia plant in Saline, Michigan

Tim Rivers

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John Stamper, an auto parts worker employed at the Faurecia factory in Saline, Michigan 40 miles west of Detroit, died on Monday of a heart attack caused by complications from COVID-19. He was 53 years old.

John worked in the receiving department as a member of the PC&L division, which includes Hilo and tug drivers who distribute parts to the various assembly lines. John Stamper had been at the plant more than six years and was always friendly and helpful, say his coworkers, whether training a transfer to his department or just passing through the plant.

As word of his death spread on Tuesday, workers at the plant expressed their sorrow and paid tribute to the man on Facebook pages associated with the plant. Workers confirmed in their comments that a case of COVID-19 had triggered the heart attack that killed him.

Stamper's death is the product of a major outbreak in the facility of more than 2,000 workers. Coronavirus is running rampant throughout the American auto industry as the automakers and parts suppliers abandon even the fig-leaf safety measures enacted after the reopening of plants in May. Although the full scale of the infections is unknown due to coverups by management and the United Auto Workers union, autoworkers report infections ripping through entire departments at plants throughout the country. It is also known that at least six workers have died of COVID-19, including two in the last couple of weeks, at Fiat Chrysler's Warren Truck Assembly Plant.

During the past week, 1,442,516 people tested positive for the virus and 16,068 died from the disease. The number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients in the US stands at 102,148, pushing both hospital systems and health care workers to the point of collapse.

Stamper's death is only the latest demonstration of the need for an immediate shutdown of nonessential production, including the auto industry, in order to combat the spread of the disease and save hundreds of thousands of lives. The billions made by the automakers and other major companies,

and the hundreds of billions of dollars wasted in the stock market boom this year, must be confiscated to pay for a massive public health program, including free and universal vaccinations and full compensation for workers while they quarantine.

"Why is it so hard to understand that COVID-19 is a serious disease? Now they are putting everybody in jeopardy," a worker from the shop told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*. "I am just really perplexed on how [the government and these corporations] seem not to be willing to do anything about this.

"Every day they say that you are supposed to be only with your family, in a gathering of no more than 10 people, but yet you can go to work with some 700 people crammed onto assembly lines. It is crazy. Unbelievable! It is not only Faurecia. It is every plant because every company is so greedy for money."

Ten days ago, workers at the Saline plant formed a rank-and-file safety committee, in opposition to the treacherous UAW, to oppose the deadly conditions in the factory and save lives. They are part of a nationwide network of committees at plants throughout American auto industry.

In response to John Stamper's untimely death the committee issued the following statement:

Brothers and Sisters of the Faurecia Saline Plant:

It is with great sadness that we mourn the death of our good friend and loyal co-worker John Stamper, who died on Monday from a heart attack induced by coronavirus, which has been allowed to spread uncontrollably through the factory.

Over the course of more than six years at the plant, John built a reputation as a conscientious and friendly man who was always willing to help his fellow workers, whether he was training someone who was new to the receiving department or helping

to distribute parts through the plant. He was friendly and good-hearted to everyone.

In our statement to announce the formation of our Rank and File Safety Committee we wrote: “In a private memo the plant manager named four cases: one each on line 702, PC&L, Shogo and Tesla. Those are just the ones that he named in the memo; there is no telling how many more cases there are that he did not even mention. He told the supervisors to keep these new outbreaks 'hush-hush.' Don't copy this memo, he said, and don't let other employees know what is going on.”

In other words, COVID-19 was spreading in PC&L, and the supervisors were told to conceal it from the workers who were being placed in jeopardy. That memo was circulated in early November and John was not hospitalized until late in the same month.

If that outbreak in PC&L, which the managers kept “hush hush,” had been reported to the rank and file and followed by a proper shutdown and sanitizing, would John Stamper be alive today?!

Perhaps John was already infected and the manager's memo was referring to him. Or perhaps it refers to another worker who John caught the illness from. But one thing is certain: Concealing the spread of COVID-19 is a crime equal to contributing to murder. The evidence is clear, the court of the collective opinion of the rank and file is in session and corporate management, the UAW and the political representatives that do their bidding must be held to account.

John is not alone. Literally hundreds more of us have medical conditions that could render an infection of COVID-19 a death sentence. Diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and breast cancer survivors are all common among us. Plant management, with the corrupt collusion of UAW local 892, conceals infections and does nothing to sanitize the factory.

These are our just demands. Join us to fight for them!

Prepare a complete shutdown to sanitize every inch of the plant!

1. All workers must be immediately notified of every case of COVID-19 including the work area and shift that is affected. This information cannot be kept from us by the company or the union. Faurecia must provide a complete database of positive and potential COVID-19 cases, updated in real time.

2. Every worker must be tested weekly with rapid

results. The current practice of casual temperature checks and surveys for symptoms has proven to be worthless. Any worker who quarantines must receive full pay.

3. Every worker must receive professional grade PPE, not these flimsy paper masks that tear apart halfway through your shift.

4. We will not be targeted, pointed, terminated or harassed in any way for taking necessary precautions, or for voicing our concerns about safety.

5. When there's a case confirmed, the factory must be shut down for at least 48 hours for deep cleaning, not just the affected area, but the whole plant, under our rank and file supervision in consultation with professional medical and scientific experts paid for by the company.

6. Social distancing must be implemented at all times—at workstations, when entering and leaving the plant and during bathroom, lunch and other break times. If social distancing is impossible at some workstations, they should either be redesigned, or the plant should be closed, with full compensation for every worker.

7. Whenever conditions are not safe, we have the right to collectively refuse to work, without any threat of retaliation by management or the UAW. The UAW sold us out long ago. We stand together. We protect your privacy, and we protect each other.

If you agree with this statement, take up the fight! Join the Faurecia Saline Rank-and-File Safety Committee today. Contact us at autoworkers@wsws.org.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact