

Stellantis' Big Lie: After six COVID-19 deaths at Warren Truck, plant management claims zero workplace deaths took place in 2020

James Brewer
11 March 2021

Join the fight against the management-union COVID-19 cover-up in the auto plants! Join or found a rank-and-file safety committee at your facility today. For more information, visit wsws.org/workers.

Those compelled to work in them know that the auto factories have been major vectors for the transmission of the COVID-19 virus throughout most of 2020.

At Stellantis' (formerly Fiat Chrysler) Warren Truck Assembly (WTAP) just north of Detroit, at least six workers have died from the coronavirus—more confirmed deaths than any other US auto plant. Whole crews have been sent home after individual employees have tested positive for the virus. Temporary part-time (TPT) workers have been brought in to fill the gaps left by workers who have either gotten sick or chosen not to report in order to protect their own and their families' safety.

In spite of this, management is claiming, in official statistics reported to the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA), that not a single workplace-related death occurred last year at Warren Truck.

Each manufacturing facility in the US is required by federal regulations to post in the view its employees a summary sheet of all injuries and illnesses causing one or more days of missed work incurred. Every year, from February 1 through April 30, OSHA form 300A is required to be on display in an accessible place for review by every employee.

The summary form for WTAP claims that for 3,945 employees who worked 4,018,038.95 hours in 2020, no deaths occurred last year. According to the form, there

were only two cases where illness or injury resulted in a day or more of work missed. The form is signed by Plant Manager Andrew Ragalyi.

In reality, by April 14 of last year, four workers had already died from COVID-19. Two of them are known by name: Lorenzo Seldon, a United Auto Workers union steward at the paint department who died on March 25; Catherine Bright Pace, who died on March 27.

WTAP workers subsequently reported to the *World Socialist Web Site* the deaths of two more workers after the plant's reopening. Stevie Brown, a TPT working at the paint shop, died on November 21 after only one month since being hired in. Stephanie Weems, also from the paint shop, died in early December.

“That's shocking that the company would blatantly tell a lie to OSHA,” one Warren Truck worker said. “They are reporting lies, and these are lost loved ones. These are lives they are lying about. They are blatantly saying nobody died there and that is completely false. It makes you wonder, how much weight does the truth hold?”

“It's not like [simply acknowledging the deaths] would mean stopping production of vehicles. But I feel like it would also give insight into loved ones lost. I feel like it is used to keep people ignorant and that's not fair.”

The lying official figures from Warren Truck are the consequence of a year of coverups by management, with the crucial assistance of the United Auto Workers union, on the spread of infections and deaths in auto plants. Since May, when the auto industry reopened

after a two-month shutdown forced by a wave of wildcat strikes, not a single major auto company has released any figures on the nationwide death toll in its plants.

In plants throughout the country, the default response from management and the UAW to infections has been: “you did not get the infection here. You must have contracted it from your family and brought to the plant.” At least some workers who have spoken with the WSWS say that their workers’ compensation claims have even been denied on this basis.

In 2020, as the coronavirus raged and demands for OSHA safety inspections increased, the number of these inspections decreased by half. As if not enough that perfunctory OSHA procedures have allowed corporations run roughshod over health and safety of employees, in 2020, facilities are no longer required to post their figures online. Under the Trump Administration, the process was ended.

Management has been keeping secret records on the true extent of infections in the plants. This was revealed last October in a leaked management report at nearby Jefferson North Assembly Plant, which listed 59 infections and two deaths that had not been previously reported.

Meanwhile, the companies have made sure that every employee knows that if he or she divulges information concerning circumstances of the spread of the virus inside the plant, they face termination. UAW stooges loyally act as enforcers of this threat.

Defying management intimidation, workers throughout the country have taken to the WSWS to expose the truth about conditions in the plants. The WSWS has reported more extensively than any other news source about safety conditions and the details about the pandemic raging through the plants.

The coverup at Warren Truck is all the more significant given the central role which workers in the plant played in organizing opposition to unsafe conditions last year. On March 16 last year, 17 workers at Warren Truck’s paint shop walked out in opposition to being compelled to work during the pandemic. This was an early episode in a global wildcat strike wave in the auto industry to demand the shutdown of nonessential production to contain the pandemic.

Thousands of other Fiat Chrysler employees walked out around that time, including at the Windsor plant

across the river from Detroit in Canada, and at the Sterling Heights, Jefferson North and Toledo North assembly plants in Michigan and Ohio. The rebellion by rank-and-file autoworkers temporarily staggered the auto companies and their bribed agents in the UAW and their Canadian counterparts Unifor.

When the plants reopened last May, UAW President Rory Gamble made the position of the UAW clear: “We all knew this day would come at some point.” Claiming that “the companies have the sole contractual right to determine the opening of plants...” he argued that nothing could be done to prevent, or even limit the companies’ reckless and homicidal drive for profit.

Since the reopening of the auto industry in May, workers at plants throughout the country have taken the initiative, with the assistance of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party, to form rank-and-file safety committees to oppose the coverup of infections and fight for safe conditions in the factories.

The WSWS is also reaching out to workers at other plants to find out whether COVID-19-related deaths are being logged in the 300A forms in their own facilities. To send us information from your plant, contact us at autoworkers@wsws.org.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact