

“They do not care whether we live or die”

???Auto parts maker Faurecia defied instructions from firefighters to evacuate its Saline, Michigan plant during fire

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Management at French auto parts maker Faurecia flouted instructions by the local fire department to evacuate the workforce during a fire two weeks ago at its plant in Saline, Michigan, workers have told the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Workers had earlier reported that many of them had not been evacuated during the fire, which started in a transformer on the plant's roof on the night of June 28. However, the WSWS has now learned that this was in defiance of responders from the Saline Area Fire Department, and that plant managers moved workers to different parts of the building in a bid to cover up its actions.

A worker who was on duty at the time of the fire said, “First they told us to go out the back. Then we had to come back in the building and go down stairs.” Evidently management was seeking to conceal the fact that people were still inside. “Then they told us to go back upstairs and go to a different part of the plant. Then we had to go back to work.”

Faurecia, the eighth-largest parts supplier in the world with 114,000 employees in 35 countries, acquired the Saline plant in 2012, which used to be operated by Ford Motor company. The company has since become notorious for enforcing a grueling schedule of seven twelve-hour days and compelling workers to come to work during the worst days of the pandemic. Last November, the Saline plant manager issued instructions to supervisors to conceal infections and deaths by COVID-19 from the co-workers of those who had become ill. That provoked workers at the plant to form a rank-and-file committee to monitor safety and begin

communicating with co-workers in the shop and at other locations.

The plant employs close to two thousand people producing mostly interior plastic parts like door panels and dashboards for Ford Motor Company, Stellantis, Tesla and other car and truck makers. Workers report that the large quantities of raw plastics, chemical release agents and lubricants which are required for this type of production mean that the plant is especially susceptible to the danger of fire and toxic smoke, and they are outraged that the company and the union would place their lives at risk.

Many are still fuming. Last Saturday, a day shift worker who was at home at the time of the fire, but heard descriptions from her friends who were on site, said, “The fire department told them to evacuate. If those chemicals caught fire, the whole place would go out like a bomb. They have no business making us work in those conditions. They do not care whether we live or die.”

She went on to decry the role of the United Auto Workers union, which has passed over the event in silence. “They didn’t say anything. They never do.”

A similar incident occurred last November at the Faurecia Gladstone plant in Columbus, Indiana. A fire broke out after propane tank inside the facility exploded in the forklift refueling area, a blast which could be felt from blocks away. One worker was airlifted to a local hospital with severe burns.

However, while workers were evacuated in that case, the plant was back up and running within only a few hours, with the support of the International

Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 1424.

At the Saline plant last Friday, a worker posted on Facebook the image of worms that appeared in the water fountain when he went to take a drink. “I got worms in the water we drink from,” he wrote under the photograph. “And this is disgusting. Where are the cleaners?”

Members of the rank-and-file committee recalled to the WSWS a recent incident when the plumbing broke and sewage seeped out of the floor of the plant. The company did not clear the area to fix the problem. On the contrary, they brought port-a -potties into the plant and forced workers to continue working right by the offal.

“None of the water fountains have been taped off,” on worker said. Another spoke of the frustration which many workers have over the unsanitary conditions. “Send this to Human Resources, and tell the union, and OSHA, health and safety, tell them you'll turn them in if this isn't fixed.”

Summing up the attitude of the company to these matters, a member of the Faurecia Saline Rank-and-File Committee said, “We are just totally expendable. If we get sick, they will just hire somebody else.”



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