Autoworker dies at Ford’s Rouge complex outside Detroit

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16 July 2021

A worker fell to his death in the early morning hours on Friday at a steel plant within the Ford Rouge complex just west of Detroit. Dearborn Fire Rescue responded to the scene and pronounced the 50-year-old man dead at the scene. Very little information has been released by the company or the United Auto Workers.

Local police reported that he had fallen from a catwalk in the Dearborn Works Steel plant located at 3001 Miller Road at around 3:15 a.m.

The union statement, written by Local 600 Vice President Chuck Browning, said, “With heavy hearts, UAW members woke up this morning to learn that one of our members passed away last night due to a fatal accident that occurred in Cleveland Cliffs Dearborn works facility in Dearborn, Michigan. [T]houghts and prayers go out to the family of our UAW brother and his coworkers during this difficult time.'

A report on Fox2detroit.com said, “No foul play is suspected at this time.”

Workers at the complex have suffered massive jobs destruction, pay cuts and systematic attacks on working conditions over many decades. Once the largest factory in the world when it first opened in 1928, today the complex holds no more than 6,000 employees. Corporate spinoffs, bankruptcies, and the restructuring under the Obama administration in 2009 have all been implemented with the active support of the UAW.

The result has meant the wholesale destruction of safety conditions, which generations of autoworkers fought to establish and develop in the aftermath of the uprisings which built the unions in the 1930s and 40s.

Sadly, the tragic events of Friday morning are not unique. In January 2017, a contract worker at the Dearborn Diversified Manufacturing Plant, which is also part of the giant Rouge complex, died when he fell from an overhead crane that had been modified a year ago to accommodate new production equipment. He had been inspecting electric drives on the 30-ton mobile crane.

At the time, Ford workers contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site* reported that the modifications to the crane, which were made on site, had left the overhead gondola too low to the ground to clear the new presses, and the original floor had been cut out and replaced with plywood.

In December of 2017, Ivan Bridgewater, a 41-year-old electrician at Ford’s Kentucky Truck Plant in Louisville, Kentucky, died in unexplained circumstances, though the deputy coroner of Jefferson County told local media that week that the cause of death was “blunt force trauma.”

“The one thing we want to know is how he died,” Ivan's stepmother, Diana Bridgewater, wrote in an email to the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*. ‘We know it was blunt force trauma, but from what? Until we know that, there will be no closure for us. If finding out what happened to our son could save another life and another family of what we have endured, at least something good would come from our son’s death. Thank you and please continue discussing this accident until we have the answers we need.”

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