Mack Trucks workers demand safety precautions as COVID-19 surges

Mack Workers Rank-and-File Committee
26 August 2021

Dear Mack Trucks Co-workers,

COVID-19 is resurging in countries around the world as governments are failing to take the public health measures necessary to combat it. This includes the United States of America, where President Joe Biden falsely stated that the best defense against the variants is to get vaccinated. While vaccination is important, vaccination alone cannot stop the spread of the virus. It must be combined with public health measures that include shutting down areas of non-essential work. This includes not reopening schools until the virus has been eradicated.

Mack Trucks and the United Auto Workers union recently announced that the mask mandate is back in effect. They did not hand any masks out, though. Instead, they simply told us to wear masks at work.

No one is speaking the truth about the current situation. Mack knows that the virus could potentially kill us. Yet their primary concern is not the spread of the virus, but to make profit off of our labor. The mask "mandate" is just something on paper for Mack, legally covering them in case one of us dies. It is something they can point to and say that precautions were in place in case any deaths happen. We know that precautions have never been in place. We know it is not our fault if we catch the virus. The fault belongs to Mack and the UAW, for allowing Mack to neglect our safety.

At Macungie, our case count has been increasing, and the UAW is only falling in line with the measures the company claims to be taking. To keep us safe, further measures need to be instituted immediately and we need to be the ones to bring them about. Mack Trucks' Lehigh Valley Operations boss Gunnar Brunius plans to increase production soon to 60 trucks per shift. That increase is not possible while keeping the six-foot minimum separation required to work safely. We already are forced to violate the six-foot distance requirement during our shifts now. With the hiring of more workers, distancing will be even more difficult.

We all need to be at minimum six feet apart, and this needs to be allowed for in the speed of the line and the manning. If an industrial engineer has not properly adjusted our manning to allow for safe working distance between each worker, that is a company problem, not ours. We need to ensure that we maintain safe distance from each other and the line will have to run at the speed needed to achieve that. If we cannot do our jobs safely, then we have to wait until our area is clear so it can be done safely.

Relaxed guidelines in the past contributed to the high number of COVID-19 cases in the facility. With the speed of the line and the heat we have been struggling with, it is no surprise that many find it impossible to wear their masks in the facility. If we are unable to wear the masks, then we cannot work safely.

Conditions need to be created to support mask wearing in the workplace. This includes air conditioning and ventilation throughout the building. If management and the UAW get to sit in their offices with air and ventilation, workers on the shop floor should get the same. If Mack cannot supply what the workers need to work six feet apart, be cooled to levels deemed appropriate by the workers, and provide a steady supply of the type of mask that best suits each worker, then production needs to stop until it is safe to resume.

If you are new to the building, know that Mack decreased the number of punch clocks in the past and naturally the UAW did nothing to stop this. Mack has decreased the number of tables in break areas also. There needs to be a return of punch clocks lost in the past and a return of individual break areas conceded

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over time, including outdoors. If Mack-Volvo believes "We Are Safety," then they must meet these requirements.

Since we know Mack and the UAW won't enforce these requirements, it is up to us to do so. The Mack Workers Rank-and-File Committee (MWRFC) exists at LVO to protect the working conditions of our coworkers. This includes their workplace safety.

Mack and the UAW are operating without your safety in mind, and you need to point that out. If we cannot work safely and COVID-19 is in the facility, why are we there? Mack-Volvo is only worried about protecting the money they make off your labor. It is up to us to protect ourselves.

Our situation is part of a much larger attack on working people all over. The reopening of schools in fall will put our children and their teachers at risk. We should not be sending children and teachers into a situation that is unsafe. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, over 180,000 children tested positive for COVID-19 in the US in mid August as school districts around the country opened up for the year. It is doubly insane to risk infecting children as the long-term effects of the disease are not fully known.

With children acting as a vector for the virus to spread, reopening schools will inevitably lead to increased infections and deaths, loss of loved ones and lifelong consequences for many, including brain and organ damage. We must unite to defend our working class brothers and sisters in education, as our struggles are fundamentally bound to each other. They have unions as well, and their unions have failed to protect them from the virus. This is also the case with the UAW. The power to stop the virus can only come from working class unity and action in the form of a political general strike to demand eradication of COVID-19!

We formed the Mack Trucks Workers Rank-and-File Committee MTWRFC in July following the UAW's betrayal of the strike of Volvo Trucks workers in Dublin, Virginia. Since that announcement, many of our fellow co-workers have contacted us and expressed an interest in getting involved in our cause.

We are inspired by the workers at NRV who dared to stand up against the Volvo corporate machine, only to get sold out by their union bargaining committee and the UAW International. By forming this committee, we are trying to be proactive to ensure that a repeat of NRV does not occur here in two years. We are looking to shine a light on and expose the problematic issues that exist here at LVO and LVLC in Macungie.

These changes need to occur to allow us to work safely within Mack Trucks:

• We must receive hazard pay in the form of double time if we are expected to work in a hazardous, potentially life-threatening environment.

• Personal protective equipment to be distributed by Mack with the option of N-95 masks.

• 10 minutes of break per hour to cool down from the heat of wearing the masks.

• Air conditioning and ventilation to assist in preserving a healthy workspace.

• Manning time allowances adjusted so that we can maintain six feet of working distance from each other. Mack should not have any problem with this because they have been telling us to maintain six feet of distance since the start of the pandemic. If you are within six feet from another worker, it is up to you to stop working until you can do your job safely. Inform your supervisor that this is the reason. If your supervisor encourages you to work within six feet of someone else, they are working against Mack's own self-imposed guidelines and putting you at risk. You cannot work if it is unsafe to do so.

• The number of punch clocks need to be tripled to aid in maintaining safe distances for workers clocking in and out between shifts. Six-minute early punch out needs to be reinstated for the same reason. It is hazardous to our health and only aids the spread of the coronavirus to be crowded around the few clocks we have now.

• A return of the break areas that were removed before and during the pandemic, including the outdoor break areas.

Text to join: (484)-466-8841

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