

Faurecia parts workers denounce forced overtime and brutal conditions in scorching hot factories

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Workers from the Faurecia plants on Gladstone Avenue in Columbus, Indiana, and Michigan Avenue in Saline, Michigan, west of Detroit denounced forced overtime and horrific working conditions during the scorching hot weather conditions over the past two weeks. Management is pushing workers past the limit of endurance, demanding continuous 80- and 84-hour weeks with no regard for the life-threatening heat with no air conditioning in the factories.

Company posters at both plants demand 11- and 12-hour days from every line every day in the imperious tone of petty dictators and the unions in both shops. The UAW at Saline and the IBEW at Gladstone have nothing to say about it. Moreover, the company's posted "Reaction Rules, Heat Stress Reduction" are insulting and inadequate.

On the contrary, the company's guidelines represent a prescription for heat stroke, seizures and death under the present conditions. The rules call for five-minute breaks when the heat index rises above 91° F (32.7° C) and 10-minute breaks when it rises to between 104° F (40° C) and 114° F (45.5° C). At between 115° F (46° C) and 124° F (51° C), the company allows 15-minute breaks each hour, when there are none scheduled, and an extra five minutes when a break is scheduled during an hour of work.

Work will not stop until the heat index rises above 125° F (51.6° C). "The Marine Corps treated us better," a worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*. "They stopped all operations at 110° F (43° C). That shows that the Marines cared more about us than the businesses do." Adding insult to injury the company bases their punishing calculations on temperature checks at locations in the factory, which have the

lowest ambient temperatures.

Operating machinery and welding booths, which comprise the majority of the shop floor are notoriously much hotter.

In a note in fine print at the bottom of the announcement, the company adopts the tone of a master addressing a slave, or a serf, "Employees are allowed covered drink containers where the surface which contacts your mouth are [sic] covered when not in use (i.e., pop bottles with screw caps) at their work site."

The company's published guidelines represent a flagrant repudiation of comparable guidelines published by the American Medical Association. The company is guilty of placing the health and well-being, even the lives, of employees at risk. Moreover, it is threatening those who refuse these conditions with dismissal.

On the contrary, when the heat index stands between 90° F (32° C) and 103° F (39° C), the AMA calls for extreme caution because the effect on the body can be "Heat stroke, heat cramps, heat exhaustion possible with prolonged exposure and/or physical activity." And working mandatory overtime in an overheated factory represents an extreme combination of both "prolonged exposure" and "physical activity."

What Faurecia considers acceptable working conditions, the AMA refers to with one word, "DANGER!" The effect of a heat index between 103° F (39° C) and 124° F (51° C) is "Heat cramps or heat exhaustion likely, and heat stroke possible with prolonged exposure and/or physical activity."

In the middle of a mandatory 80-hour workweek, a worker from the Saline plant 40 miles west of Detroit told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "This is horrible. I

hurt all over, and I have to be back there at 5 o'clock tomorrow morning." She went on to denounce the inhuman conditions. "The company gives us packets of dry Gatorade, but we have to buy the bottled water," she said.

Her co-worker from Columbus, Indiana, who is member of the Faurecia Rank-and-File Committee, said, "At 5:00 a.m. last Tuesday, I saw an ambulance taking somebody out of the plant, most likely from heat exhaustion. We had only four heat breaks all week, maybe five."

They never slow production to allow workers time to walk to the break rooms and back to the line. There is always the threat to get back on the line or get written up. The speed-up is non-stop.

Workers are reporting all the classic symptoms associated with heat fatigue and heat stroke: cramps, headaches, disorientation and nausea, but the union does nothing about it.

"They do time studies to get the maximum number of parts from every minute of work," commented another Rank-and-File Committee member from the Saline plant. "But they won't study how long it takes to get a drink of water on a hot day. The breaks stay the same. In fact, since Faurecia took over in 2012," he continued, "the UAW gave up personal break time. The union is not coming down the line to enforce water breaks and cooling down time. Any medical association will tell you that you can drink water, but you also need bathroom breaks and time for cooling down.

"They say they encourage safety and hydration," he said. "We need to challenge these claims. I have seen four and five ambulances at a time carrying workers out of that plant. Breaks have been cut to the absolute bare minimum because they want to squeeze people for as much as they can get."

Even under the company's wholly inadequate guidelines, the supervisors are responsible to extend break times based on the rise in the heat index, but they do not do it. The unions have completely abdicated any of the traditional functions of protecting the safety of workers on the job. Today the unions function as another arm of corporate management to apply pressure on the workers to extract the last ounce of profit from their labor.

When a worker is a minute late to a job assignment, he or she gets written up. But when a planner at the

Gladstone plant wrote incorrect job assignments last week that produced a parts shortage, the day shift had to work three hours overtime for three days straight to make up for the planner's mistake.

Without a rank-and-file committee monitoring safety conditions, workers have no way of knowing what hazards they are being subjected to. The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* encourages workers to send us reports on conditions in your plants. To learn more about building a rank-and-file committee, write to autoworkers@wsws.org.



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