“They gassed the line and didn’t allow workers to go home!”

Dana workers say management sprayed them with toxic chemicals after COVID outbreak

Joe Lorenz, George Kirby
3 September 2021

So little does Dana Inc. care about its workers that it keeps them on the assembly line while it is sprayed with toxic chemicals supposedly to prevent the spread of COVID-19, workers at the Ft. Wayne, Indiana plant have told the *World Socialist Web Site*. As a result, workers have been exposed to the powerful chemical disinfectant Aspen One Step, which has specific warnings about the dangers of ingestion, inhalation or eye or skin exposure, the workers report.

One worker, who was angered over this reckless practice, explained what happened. “A worker called into the union and reported it to Human Resources that they tested positive. Management instructed the ‘chip house’ cleaning crew employees to spray the department for COVID-19. The shift supervisor instructed workers not to leave while the spraying took place. Within minutes workers had headaches and were nauseated, and the supervisor refused to let workers go home. They gassed the line and didn’t allow workers to go home!”

Other workers described the ruthless negligence of management. “The BS supervisor told the union he would discipline all the workers. After a struggle by the workers involving the plant superintendent, the workers were sent home,” he reported. One particularly arrogant supervisor, Ron Bortner, a human resource manager, told workers the chemical was harmless and said, “You could eat [it] on your food,” the worker reported.

In fact, the label on the bottle, which workers photographed and sent to the WSWS, has a long list of precautionary statements about exposure to the fungicide and the emergency measures that must be taken if it is inhaled, ingested or makes contact with the eyes or skin.

The label says the following:

First Aid:

· Have the product container or label with you when calling a poison control center or doctor or going for treatment.

If in Eyes:

· Hold eye open and rinse slowly and gently with water for 15-20 minutes.

· Remove contact lenses, if present, after the first 5 minutes, then continue rinsing eye.

· Call a poison control center or doctor for treatment advice.

If on Skin or Clothing:

· Take off contaminated clothing.

· Rinse skin immediately with plenty of water for 15-20 minutes.

· Call poison control center or doctor for treatment advice.

If Swallowed:

· Call poison control center or doctor immediately for treatment advice.

· Have person sip a glass of water if able to swallow.

· Do not induce vomiting unless told to do so by the poison control center or doctor.

· Do not give anything by mouth to an unconscious person.

If Inhaled:

· Move person to fresh air.

· If person is not breathing, call 911 or an ambulance, then give artificial respiration, preferably by mouth to mouth, if possible.

· Call a poison control center or doctor for further treatment advice.

Note to Physician:

· Probable mucosal damage may contraindicate the use of gastric lavage.

In other words, the product could damage the nose, throat and lungs, and this could be worsened by

© World Socialist Web Site

traditional efforts to pump the stomach (gastric lavage). According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the disinfectant's chief chemical ingredient, ammonium chloride, is on the "Right to Know Hazardous Substance List" and can severely irritate the skin, irritate the nose, throat and lungs if inhaled, cause an asthma-like allergy, and exposure can affect the kidneys.

According to a production worker, the spraying of One Step was not limited to one section of the plant nor was production stopped. "They bring in these contractors to spray some mystery chemical to clean the area. They won't stop production. They'll just tell the infected person(s) to go home and continue the line."

Bortner, the human resources manager, was promoted after the line was sprayed, workers said. They described his policy of "harassing workers, it's basically a human rights violation. If you get FMLA, you have a bullseye on your back by them."

Like other corporations, Dana Inc. sacrifices safety for production and profit. "People are dying in the plant!" another worker said. "I knew three production workers and one skilled tradesman who died. The line they worked on had 11 people before. These workers were buffing materials and repairing machines. One guy died after a smoldering fire, not because of the fire itself, but inhalation of the smoldering smoke led to cancer. The two other workers also had cancer and died.

"There was an exhaust filter for these machines, so workers wouldn't breathe in the smoke. Many times, it was disconnected. People would call OSHA, but nothing would happen. The union didn't do anything either. These local officials should all be in prison."

After reading about Danny Walters—a Dana worker who died after suffering a seizure at the Dry Ridge, Kentucky plant in June 2021—he continued, "There should be a collection for his wife. It's absurd what happened to him. They don't care whether we live or die. Foremen at our plant victimize workers. It's similar to workers getting murdered by cops."

He continued explaining the lack of repairs in the plant with the continuation of the line. "When it rains or snows, the roof leaks. One winter we had leaks, and a repair crew was hired in. The repair equipment slipped on water and knocked out the transformer pole, and the crew was fired. Instead of repairing the roof, they put out barrels to collect the water."

A Tier One worker said, "Several people are falling out like flies with no sanitization in the plant. In many departments there's hardly any air flow, oil is spilled, parts are hanging incorrectly, the roof leaks. None of these are ever fixed. Most times it gets up to 100-115 degrees in the summer time. If we do get fans, they are damaged, dusty and oil-covered, with broken wires. I left work wiping sweat off my forehead, and it was crystalized salt. You step outside the plant or get a drink, the supervisor scolds you to get back to work."

Roughly 4,000 workers in the US are fighting against Dana, which recorded $484 million in gross earnings in the first half of 2021. The workers have overwhelmingly defeated the pro-company contract being pushed by the United Auto Workers and United Steelworkers unions.

Workers voiced their opposition to the contract. "We're expected to keep making more parts while things are taken away from us. The union gets paid. Why would they care if we get paid less or treated poorly?" Jeff Gleason, a District 7 United Steelworkers rep, made $103,559 in 2019, while Tier Two workers and workers hired after 2017 will not reach $22.00 an hour—or $44,000 a year—until 2026, under the UAW-USW contract.

Responding to the contract struggle, another worker said, "If Ford says we want parts, get back to work. The union and Dana will try to ram through the contract."

Workers at Dana Inc. already work up to 80-hour weeks. This week workers at Fort Wayne were told that the Labor Day weekend would be mandated workdays. This is after most have worked continuously for two to three weeks straight and some for even longer. The UAW and USW are trying to force workers to remain on the job—even after they repudiated the contract—in order to help management stockpile parts in the event of a strike.

One worker said management told workers that the parts orders were behind. "We were told Ford, GM and Chrysler made orders today. Many of the older workers said that they're mandating us because of the threat of a strike." She continued, "Growing up all I heard was how great Dana Fort Wayne and Fort Wayne GM was. Working here is something else. When you see the trash cans filled from rain water coming through the ceiling, it's like a Third World country."

Join the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee and fight by our side. Email us at danawrfc@gmail.com, *and text us at* (248)-602-0936.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site