

COVID-19 hospitalizes Dana workers as internal document reveals company policy ordering COVID-positive workers to return to work

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The spread of COVID-19 at Dana auto parts plants across the US is growing more dangerous and deadly. At the plant in Dry Ridge, Kentucky, an outbreak is taking place that places the lives of workers, their families and surrounding towns and cities at risk.

Workers at the Dry Ridge plant report that four workers are currently hospitalized, with at least one worker on a ventilator fighting for his life. The family of this worker have set up a GoFundMe page asking for contributions, as he is the family's main breadwinner.

The worker, whose name is Jeff, is "very hardworking husband, father, brother, son and grandpa who unfortunately contracted COVID pneumonia and has been battling in the ICU for over a week now," according to the family. "He currently is receiving treatment in the hospital and has had to be given a ventilator to help him breathe. Jeff has slowly showed signs of progress, but also has a long road to recovery." The family concluded, "We really appreciate the love and support."

The Dry Ridge plant should be considered a "superspreader" location. However, Dana is sending teams of workers from plants in Warren, Michigan, and Columbia, Missouri, to Dry Ridge to make up production quota shortfalls likely caused by the fact that so many workers at the plant are out sick. As a result, those workers are at high risk of bringing the virus from Dry Ridge back to their home plants.

Dana's company policy is to allow infections to spread even in some cases where they are detected. According to an internal "Covid Exposure Flowchart" acquired by the *World Socialist Web Site*, Dana's official COVID policy is to force workers who test positive, but are vaccinated and no longer exhibiting symptoms, to return to work.

Those who are asymptomatic can still spread the virus, however, virtually guaranteeing that they will expose their coworkers. If a vaccinated worker is exposed, but never develops symptoms in the first place, the company's policy is to not even bother to test them at all.

Dana's decision to force workers to risk their lives has impressed Wall Street. Although Dana pleads poverty with workers, the corporate credit ratings agency Fitch Ratings admitted in a statement yesterday that "Dana's strong liquidity position and financial flexibility helped it manage through the worst of the [coronavirus] pandemic relatively well."

Fitch added: "Dana's ratings also incorporate the expected improvement in global end-market conditions as the effects of the coronavirus pandemic wane, as well as steps that the company has taken to increase [profit] margins." Those "steps" include forcing speedups in the midst of a deadly pandemic.

Fitch also reported that Dana produces parts for vehicles that are "relatively less affected" by a global microchip shortage that has impacted some vehicle production, meaning the Big Three would be directly hit by a strike by Dana workers.

As Dana executives and shareholders celebrate the favorable reviews from Wall Street, anger is growing among workers who are tired of risking their lives for a corporation that takes next-to-no precautions to protect workers.

Referring to the WSWs's initial report on the outbreaks at Dana, a worker at the Dana plant in Toledo, Ohio, told the *World Socialist Web Site*: "I can confirm at Toledo there is hardly a standard for COVID-19 cases. Our own safety managers never have their masks on. We are never

informed if anyone has tested positive or if we're in close contact. There is no mandated cleaning or sterilization, and the company hasn't fogged the lines since last year. On top of that, it's incredibly hot inside the plant. No ventilation in the bathrooms and some of the ceiling fans above the work floor have been broken for over a month."

These conditions take place in "union shops" organized by the United Auto Workers (UAW) and United Steelworkers (USW). Workers are only at work right now because the UAW and USW are extending an expired contract that allows such brutal conditions.

In the past two weeks, over 90 percent of Dana workers voted down a tentative agreement for a five-year contract that maintained or worsened the conditions enforced under the previous contract. The "unions" are presently forcing workers to stockpile parts for the company in case of a strike. The USW admitted on September 10 that it is extending the contract because "without an extension the company is allowed to discontinue automatic dues collection."

In an interview with the *World Socialist Web Site* yesterday, a former Dana worker in Paris, Tennessee, explained how mandated overtime increases the danger of COVID-19 infection:

"That doubles your chances of exposure. Not only do you have to come in for your shift, but when you have to come in early or stay late, you're exposed to a completely different shift of a completely different set of people. If you don't get your test results back in a certain amount of time you're going to get pointed. We're people, and we deserve basic human rights, and part of those rights is being able to protect ourselves, our families and our coworkers from something that is killing so many people every single day."

Meanwhile, the company remains very vulnerable to a strike, which the UAW and USW are doing everything they can to prevent.

Dana workers say they are studying a September 5 article published by the Associated Press titled "How long will car prices stay sky-high due to a parts shortage," which explains that auto parts workers are currently occupying a critical chokehold over the global auto industry.

The article warns of a "worsening supply shortage" that "involves not just computer chips" but other parts. "Because of the virus and a general labor shortage, auto parts makers might not be able to make up for lost production.

"With consumer demand still high, automakers feel

little pressure to discount their vehicles," the AP article notes. "The average price of a new vehicle sold in the US in August hit a record price of just above \$41,000."

Yesterday, the Dana Workers' Rank-and-File Committee (DWRFC) published a statement entitled, "The COVID-19 outbreak at Dana plants puts our lives in danger! Close all Dana plants *now*! Full pay for time off!"

The DWRFC is a network of workers formed to share information, encourage democratic discussion among the rank-and-file and plan common action. The statement reads, "The Delta variant of COVID-19 is spreading rapidly through Dana plants, putting our lives and the lives of our loved ones at risk of death or lifelong debilitation. The corporations will shut production when they run out of parts, but not for COVID outbreaks. In the eyes of the company and the UAW and USW, a dead worker can be replaced but a missing axle cannot be."

The DWRFC calls for to building rank-and-file strike committees to mobilize all workers in each plant in support of four demands:

- An immediate shutdown of all plants to stop the spread of COVID.
- Immediate publication of COVID case information daily, at every plant.
- Payment of full wages during any quarantine.
- A contract with a 40-hour week, eight-hour day, and 75 percent wage increase.

Workers must not be forced to choose between infection and eviction while the company and unions profit.

Join the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee by emailing us at danawrfc@gmail.com or texting us at (248) 602-0936.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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