

Three Dana plants in Michigan were cited by state regulators for COVID-19 safety violations

Our reporters
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Three Dana auto parts plants in St. Clair, Warren and Auburn Hills in southeastern Michigan were cited by the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) over the past year for not complying with state safety standards relating to COVID-19.

The new revelations come amid the spread of coronavirus at Dana plants across the country, especially in its Kentucky and Tennessee plants. Multiple sources have informed the *World Socialist Web Site* of a major outbreak at the plant in Dry Ridge, Kentucky, where dozens of workers are currently out on quarantine.

Workers also reported that there had been major outbreaks earlier in the pandemic at all of the Michigan plants cited by MIOSHA. However, due to Dana's cover-up of the true scale of infections in its plants, aided and abetted by the United Auto Workers, the only hard figures are available for the Warren plant. According to the latest totals released to workers, 167 people, out of a total workforce of approximately 600, have fallen ill with COVID-19 at some point during the pandemic, including 114 in 2021 alone. One worker, whose name has not been released, has died.

These figures are proportionately three times higher than infections in the surrounding suburb of Warren. If only cases from 2021 are considered, the infection rate in the plant is nearly four times higher.

These figures provide only a glimpse of Dana's sacrifice of the health and safety of workers, as well as their friends and family, for profit. This is being made all the more dangerous by the imposition of brutal mandatory overtime, with many workers going for weeks before getting a single day off. This is driving

enormous levels of opposition among Dana workers, who voted down a sellout contract backed by the UAW and the United Steelworkers (USW) earlier this month by a 9-to-1 margin. However, they are being kept on the job on a day-to-day contract extension by the unions, in spite of overwhelming support for a strike.

All of the citations were for violations of the "Emergency Rules Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)," which was issued by the State of Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity and signed by Governor Gretchen Whitmer on October 14, 2020.

The first inspection was opened on November 30, 2020 at the Dana plant in St. Clair, Michigan, near Port Huron. The inspection was part of a State Emphasis Plan targeting manufacturing facilities for enforcement of the Emergency Rules. It resulted in two "Serious" and one "Other than Serious" citations.

The first serious citation was for not observing social distancing or enforcing mask wearing. "The employer did not enforce the use of face coverings for employees that could not maintain 6 feet of separation from other individuals in the workplace," the citation says.

The second serious citation states that management covered up infections. "The employer did not contact the St. Clair County Health Department when three (3) known positive COVID-19 cases were detected at the workplace."

The "Other than Serious" citation states, "The employer did not maintain a record of the following requirements: (a.) COVID-19 employee training. (b.) Daily health screenings for each employee entering the workplace. (c.) Notifications to the St. Clair County Health Department of known COVID-19 cases at the

workplace.”

The findings of this inspection, while limited in scope, made clear the disregard the company has for the health and safety of its employees, as well as that of the broader working-class community. At the height of the pandemic, Dana was aware of multiple positive COVID-19 cases within its facility, had employees working with no social distancing and without masks, and neglected to contact the Health Department so proper quarantining and contact tracing could be facilitated.

Two additional inspections at Dana facilities in metro Detroit were initiated in response to employee complaints relating directly to COVID-19.

The first complaint inspection was opened on January 22, 2021 at the Dana plant in Auburn Hills, approximately 20 miles north of Detroit. The plant assembles and balances driveshafts that supply the Stellantis Warren Truck and Toledo Jeep plants.

This inspection resulted in one serious citation for a violation of Rule 5(4) of the Emergency Rules which reads, “The employer shall increase facility cleaning and disinfection to limit exposure to SARS-CoV-2, especially on high-touch surfaces (e.g., door handles), paying special attention to parts products and shared equipment (e.g., tools, machinery, and vehicles).”

Another complaint inspection was opened on February 26, 2021 at the Warren plant just north of Detroit. This inspection resulted in two serious citations. The first was for a violation of Rule 3(2), which requires employers to categorize job tasks and procedures (from Low to Very High) according to COVID-19 exposure risk. The second was for a violation of Rule 7(6), which reads, “The employer shall require face coverings in shared spaces, including during in-person meetings and in restrooms and hallways.”

The Emergency Rules and MIOSHA “enforcement” were woefully inadequate. The fines for the three inspections at Dana totaled \$12,000; St. Clair was fined \$4,000; Auburn Hills was fined \$4,500; and Warren was fined \$3,500. All of the citations have been contested by Dana. As long as the citations remained in the appeals process, no fines needed to be paid and no documentation of corrective action needed to be provided.

In the meantime the Emergency Rules have been

gutted. After being renewed in full on April 13, 2021, portions of the Emergency Rules were then walked back in May 2021. Then on June 20, 2021 the Emergency Rules were rescinded and replaced by the Federal OSHA “COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Standard,” which only covers health care facilities and leaves manufacturing and all other workplaces with no protection.

The United Auto Workers (UAW) “union” has also played a despicable role. The UAW is entitled to participate in MIOSHA inspections as they occur. Union officials were well aware of the conditions within the plants but have ignored the issue and downplayed the risks, while continuing to collaborate with Dana to force employees to work seven days a week.



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