

UAW and Mack Trucks allowing COVID to spread at Macungie, Pennsylvania plant

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Over the past several weeks, positive COVID-19 cases have been rising at the Mack Trucks facility in Macungie, Pennsylvania, without any additional safety precautions or shutting down of the facility—with full pay—to prevent potential mass infection and deaths.

According to a UAW-Mack memo sent out to all employees, between October 18 and October 22, two workers tested positive for the virus, bringing the total number of cases at the plant to 455. For the week of October 22 to October 29, an additional five workers tested positive, bringing the number of active cases to seven.

In all likelihood, these numbers are an undercount. At other plants, the pro-company United Auto Workers (UAW) and corporations have done everything possible to conceal the number of cases and deaths while ignoring scientifically guided mitigation policies such as social distancing, adequate ventilation, mask wearing, quarantining, and contact tracing, to name a few.

According to Mack workers who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworkers Newsletter*, while they are assembling the trucks deprived of proper social distancing and other mitigation measures, UAW and Mack officials are sitting in air conditioned offices, safe from infection.

“Things are looking grim at Mack. There’s no direction by the company or UAW to wear masks. The majority are maskless as the infection rate climbs,” said a Mack Trucks worker. The UAW-Mack memo claims “the health and wellbeing of our employees is our first priority,” but workers at the plant know this is a charade and the uptick in cases adds further evidence to the profit-over-lives policy being pursued by the corporations and their lapdog, the UAW.

In fact, when the pandemic first spread across the United States, the UAW refused to call out its

membership to shut down production and protect workers from infection. The rank-and-file, however, decided to down their tools and launched a series of wildcat actions, which compelled the closure of most auto plants. According to a July 2020 study reported by *CBS News*, the economic shutdowns initiated by workers “saved between 900,000 and 2.7 million U.S. lives” in the first wave of the pandemic.

The shutdowns were limited and uncoordinated, only lasting a short time, as Democrats and Republicans passed a bill giving mountains of cash to Wall Street banks and corporations. Soon after, the UAW played a key part in the drive to reopen auto plants, over massive opposition, so that workers could produce the profits to repay the corporate bailout.

An April report assessing Mack Trucks’ first quarter shows “deliveries increased 17 percent in the first quarter of 2021 compared to 2020, up from 5,501 units to 6,456 units in 2021,” according to the *WFMZ* local news. The news outlet cites comments by Volvo Group CEO Martin Lundstedt, who states, “The global supply chain for semiconductors as well as for other components remains very unstable and the uncertainty about the development is high.”

This has since come to pass, as numerous shifts at the Macungie plant have been furloughed for weeks at a time. However, these shutdowns have been the result of parts shortages, not health concerns.

Although the UAW-Mack memos have not stated whether anybody has become seriously ill or died from the disease, it is only a matter of time before a worker dies, must be sent to the emergency room, or brings the virus home to a family member.

“I worry how this is going to affect us all long term, how much damage is going to be done to our bodies and mentalities. If the company is allowed to risk our

lives what else is left?” asked the Mack Truck worker. The worker noted, “I feel like I’m walking into a nightmare every working day. My boss even pulls his mask down to talk to me. I’m standing there wearing an N95 and he feels comfortable pulling his neck gaiter ‘mask’ down.”

Many autoworkers have already died from the disease, and the culpability resides squarely on the shoulders of the UAW. The most recent death of an autoworker from the virus, unreported in the media and ignored by the UAW, was on October 16. Blair Alexander Braden, who worked at Stellantis’s Sterling Stamping Plant in Michigan, caught COVID-19 and tragically died. He was 47 years old, a father of two small children, and had worked at the plant for only a year.

This infection-and-death policy of the corporations, the pro company trade unions and the ruling class, which has enriched America’s billionaires—increasing their wealth by \$5 trillion or 70 percent—is being opposed by new organizations that have been formed in the auto industry and at Mack Trucks.

The Mack Trucks Workers Rank-and-File Committee (MTWRFC), formed during the UAW’s betrayal of the Volvo strike at New River Valley, Virginia, had issued a statement in August during another deadly wave of the virus demanding safety precautions to save the lives of workers and their families.

As cold weather and winter approach, with more indoor activities, leading scientists are saying another deadly wave will hit. Workers need to demand safety measures that will save lives, rather than line the pocketbooks of the CEOs and management.

The MTWRFC demands:

- 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 Trucks violates its only guidelines when it tells workers to do otherwise and it is workers’ right to stop

working until you can do your job safely.

- The tripling of punch clocks to aid in maintaining safe distancing for workers entering and leaving the facility.
- A return of the break areas that were removed before and during the pandemic, including the outdoor break areas.

Workers interested in building the committee should contact the rank-and-file committee or call 717-739-9517.



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