

Many questions in death of worker outside Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly Plant

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The tragic death Tuesday of a Stellantis worker at the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant has saddened friends and colleagues who knew him.

M. Ronald Anthony Bandy, known to coworkers as “Tony,” died Tuesday evening after his car caught fire in the parking lot of the giant assembly plant in the north suburbs of Detroit. According to press reports, a worker called security Tuesday evening to report a car fire in the employee parking lot. Police who responded at 6:30 PM said they found a body in the car.

No further information on the circumstances of the tragedy have been reported by police or fire officials. The Macomb County Medical Examiner’s Office told the *World Socialist Web Site* that a death certificate with cause of death will not be released until next week.

A worker at SHAP recalled Tony, “He was a good guy, he was funny. We would laugh every day.”

Stellantis initially claimed that the deceased worker had not been employed at the plant. In response, the SHAP worker noted, “He worked with us at Warren Truck in 2013. We were all in the same group at WTAP on 2nd shift. We all came over in 2018 to SHAP. He’s been there ever since.”

Workers at SHAP told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* that the company is claiming the fire was accidentally caused by smoking, an assertion that many disputed. “We don’t believe that, but we don’t have proof,” one SHAP worker, who preferred to remain anonymous, told the *WSWS*.

“They claimed he left the plant to get his medication and he came back, and somehow, they think that he was

sitting in the car and maybe passed out or something with a cigarette and burned himself up. I don’t believe that one bit. A cigarette burning a car? I don’t believe that. We tried to figure that out all night. What kind of cigarette would set a whole car on fire?”

If his coworkers’ suspicions are correct, it is not known what circumstances might have led Tony to take his own life, but workers at SHAP have faced continual stress since the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020. In addition to being forced to work in COVID-infested workspaces, workers have had to contend with the disregard of safety by management with the assistance of the United Auto Workers. This has been compounded by continual forced overtime as Stellantis tries to churn out more highly profitable Dodge Ram trucks built at the plant.

Toward the end of 2021, the plant was put in “critical status” by Stellantis, allowing management to schedule unlimited mandatory overtime for 90 days. With COVID ripping through the workforce, there have been continuing manpower shortages. Management has been unable to hire and retain enough temporary workers to fill the gaps due to the poverty level wages and unsafe and abusive conditions. Starting pay for temporary workers is just \$15.78, what many fast food restaurants now pay.

In April 2021, Stellantis with the support of the UAW, imposed a 7-day, 12-hour work schedule on skilled trades workers at SHAP. Many workers took early retirement or quit rather than submit to the abusive work schedule that effectively returned workers to the conditions of the 19th century.

The rise of inflation, now at 8.5 percent, has meant cuts to workers’ real wages, creating stress and more pressure on workers to agree to killing levels of overtime just to pay bills.

Last month, reports circulating on Facebook cited SHAP as a plant targeted for job cuts in the coming year. The cuts, coming despite the fact that Stellantis faces depleted inventories, reflect the enormous pressure on all the automakers to slash costs as they hoard cash to fund the conversion to electric vehicle production.

A worker described the situation. “They’re so short, they’ve cut so many jobs in there. They’re running a skeleton crew. So they have to call around other divisions if people call off. It’s just been short and right now we’re running a skeleton crew. Even supervisors are working, which they aren’t supposed to. I asked the union rep, and they said they can do that.

“We work three weekends a month and have one off, six days a week. If they cut your time during the week, it’s straight time until you get 40 hours. If they cut your time 30 minutes all week, that’s 2.5 hours. Then you have to work 2.5 hours on Saturday before you start getting time and a half.

“They don’t even care about COVID any more. They don’t care about you wearing a mask. Even though cases in Michigan are rising, that’s not an issue any more. I wear mine every day. But they don’t enforce that at all. They don’t enforce cleaning anymore.”

The death of Tony Gandy is only the most recent in a string of tragedies involving workers at Detroit area Stellantis plants, many related to COVID. There was an unconfirmed suicide of a worker at the Mack Avenue Assembly Plant in Detroit last month.

In December last year, SHAP worker Monique Bowen and her husband Anthony died from COVID. At the nearby Sterling Stamping Plant, seven workers died in 2021: five from COVID, one from a fatal accident and another from an apparent drug overdose.

A Jefferson assembly worker in Detroit died in June 2021 when her car was hit by a train while leaving the plant. As many as two dozen workers may have died at Warren Truck since the start of the pandemic, though the exact number is not known due to the cover-up of COVID deaths carried out by management with the collusion of the United Auto Workers.



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