

# Southern California UPS driver dies from heat stroke

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Esteban Chavez Jr., 24, a delivery driver for UPS, died while delivering packages last week after he reportedly collapsed inside his truck while in a customer's driveway. The family says he was unconscious for over 20 minutes before someone finally discovered him.

He had been on his route in Pasadena on June 25, when temperatures were in the upper 90s for most of the day. UPS, like many other package delivery companies, does not have air conditioning in their trucks. During the summer months temperatures in the cabs of the trucks can exceed 140 degrees.

While the coroner has yet to determine the precise cause of death, the family has stated that the most likely cause was heat stroke. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, heat related deaths are one of the deadliest weather-related health outcomes in the United States, with over 1,300 deaths a year attributable to heat exposure. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, over 11,000 Americans have died from heat related causes since 1979.

Esteban Chavez Jr. had worked for UPS for four years and died only one day after his 24th birthday. His family said that he enjoyed working for UPS and was looking to make it his career. Reports from co-workers, friends and customers have all said that he was a hardworking, friendly and gregarious young man and that he will be deeply missed by all who knew him.

A GoFundMe campaign that was started to raise money for Esteban's funeral and memorial service has already passed the goal of \$20,000 as of this writing.

His father, Esteban Chavez Sr., said of his son, "They say the good die young, I'm sure my son was one of them." Speaking of his grief, he stated, "It hurts, it's a pain that's never going to go away. And that's

something I wish on nobody, having the experience to lose your child."

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Alfonzo, a UPS worker, who mourned the loss of his fellow worker stating, "The death of Esteban has alerted all UPS workers that our lives should be placed ahead of UPS profits. His untimely death has sent shockwaves down our hub, and workers at UPS send our condolences to his family."

Alfonzo continued, "Esteban died in the midst of a war, a class war that is being waged against the working class. In this war, workers are forced to subjugate themselves and their bodies to profit maximization that benefits the shareholders. While the bourgeoisie at the top can rake in the profits generated by the workers, it is the workers who find themselves working long, hard and grueling hours in UPS hubs and facilities in record setting heat waves due to climate change."

Esteban's death comes shortly before the expiration of the UPS contract next year. "The workers have no illusions on the prospects of these negotiations," Alfonzo said. "Instead, we are playing a game theory on what concessions the union will hand to UPS in the middle of a likely recession, high inflation and as the nation is heading towards World War III over Ukraine. The only way out of this predicament is for working class solidarity; not only within the US but with workers internationally."

During every contract negotiation in recent memory, workers have demanded that UPS put air conditioning in their vehicles, only to watch as the Teamsters eliminate it from the final version of every contract for one reason or another.

UPS has lost a number of wrongful death lawsuits related to heat stroke over the years. In 2016, after her

husband nearly died from heat stroke, Theresa Klenk, a nurse of 20 years, began a petition on change.org which as of this writing has garnered 1,258,682 signatures. The petition demands that UPS provide air conditioning to all drivers.

According to the Bureau of Labor, delivery drivers account for over one fifth of all job-related fatalities. While it is not the most dangerous job in the United States (that ignoble title belongs to loggers), it is the occupation with the highest number of deaths, with traffic accidents being the biggest killer of workers on the job across all professions.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics says that, “Workers in transportation and material moving occupations and construction and extraction occupations accounted for nearly half of all fatal occupational injuries (47.4 percent), representing 1,282 and 976 workplace deaths, respectively.” They also point out that the profession of delivery drivers is the seventh most dangerous occupation and the job with the most on the job fatalities.

A statement from UPS said, “We are deeply saddened by the loss of our driver Esteban Chavez and extend our deepest condolences to his family and friends. We are cooperating with the investigating authorities and are respectfully deferring questions about this incident to them.”

In other words, they wash their hands of his death and will continue to run their trucks without air conditioning, endangering the lives of every one of their drivers. As an investigative article published by NBC in 2019 noted, “At least 107 UPS workers in 23 states have been hospitalized for heat illnesses since 2015.” The only company to report more heat related incidents in the United States is the US Postal Service, which also does not have air conditioning in its trucks.



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