# Worker missing for two months determined to have fallen into industrial plastics shredder

**Jane Wise**
**15 July 2022**

Two months after he went missing from his job, the Spartanburg County Coroner has determined that Duncan (Alex) Burrell Gordon died when he fell into the plastics shredding machine on which he was working.

The 20-year-old disappeared in the middle of his overnight shift at the Industrial Recycling and Recovery plant in Greer, South Carolina on May 5. The man's father, Mike Gordon, the supervisor on duty at the plant when the incident occurred, drove the search for his son over the course of the ensuing month.

The machine on which Gordon was working was inspected on four separate occasions in the month after his disappearance. Immediately by his father, then by a representative of the sheriff's office. Next sheriff's investigators brought in a cadaver K-9 dog which was alerted to human remains under the conveyor belt of the machine. On June 12, more than a month later, the coroner's office was called in to take over the investigation.

Roughly two ounces of material consisting of human fat, and particles of skin and bone were retrieved from the machine and later identified using DNA comparison to be the remains of Alex Gordon.

Between the time Gordon was noticed missing, shortly after his shift ended at 6 a.m., and the arrival of the first investigator, an estimated 30 tons of plastic had continued to run through the shredder.

The exact timeline of the investigations into the tragedy is unclear as the family and Industrial Recycling and Recovery are under legal advice not to speak publicly about the incident. However, Gordon's mother noted that his father filed a missing person's report the afternoon of May 5 and the first sheriff's officials arrived at the plant sometime after the report was filed.

Despite Gordon's hat being found hanging on a forklift near the shredder and surveillance footage indicating that he had not left the premises, operations in the recycling plant appear to have continued unabated for hours after he went missing.

Alex Gordon is among a number of workers who have recently died horrible and preventable deaths due to the indifference of management to their health and safety. On June 2, Steven Dierkes, a 39-year-old worker was killed by "thermal annihilation" at Caterpillar's Mapleton foundry when he slipped and fell into a crucible holding molten metals. Only six months earlier, at the same plant, 59-year-old Scott Adams died when he fell through a hole in the floor that reportedly was not properly covered.

In Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, the third worker in two years died on June 6 at National Steel Car's plant when he was crushed by a railcar bulkhead. Currently, the company faces charges for the two previous deaths by the Ontario Occupation Health and Safety Act (OHSA).

In every case, these companies had been cited for numerous safety violations by the government agencies that are charged with overseeing the health and safety of workers. In the United States, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) levies paltry fines without further consequences on the companies which skirt safety guidelines that interfere with the uninterrupted generation of profits. In the case of Industrial Recycling and Recovery where Alex Gordon was a machine operator, OSHA responded to a complaint in 2018 and cited the company for failure to provide fall protection on the shredder that killed him. The company was fined a mere $500.

In an interview with the *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, Gordon's mother shared that Alex was enrolled at a local technical college after graduating early in the

© World Socialist Web Site

hope of getting a job with Michelin in Spartanburg. When COVID-19 hit and his classes moved online, Gordon withdrew from school and went to work with his father at the recycling plant.

While Alex avoided the fate of over 1 million American workers and 6,352,910 workers worldwide who have died from COVID-19 since 2020, he is one of 6,000 workers who die on the job every day, according to the International Labor Organization.

As the coroner's office quibbles about whether it can issue a death certificate with only two ounces of his remains as proof of his demise, Alex Gordon's death stands as a grotesque metaphor for the utter disposability of the working class in the eyes of capitalism.

Alex Gordon's disappearance might have languished in perpetuity as a missing person's case had his father not doggedly persuaded the authorities to look for clues to his son's demise.

Through their callous indifference and neglect, the Democrats, Republicans, as well as the unions, have declared the lives of workers to be expendable. Whether it be the official denial by capitalist governments of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the repeal laws protecting women's autonomy over their own bodies, or the promotion of the idea that a nuclear attack can be survived, the assault on workers by the ruling elite is escalating.

Workers are, however, stepping up their fight back. The campaign by Will Lehman for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) aims to develop a rank-and-file rebellion of workers against the bureaucratic apparatus of the UAW as part of a counter-offensive of workers throughout the US and internationally. In Sri Lanka, workers and young people stormed the presidential palace in Colombo last week and ousted President Gotabhaya Rajapakse and his Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe after suffering months of austerity, shortages, and skyrocketing inflation.

The opposition to a system that deems human life expendable while holding private profit sacred requires the reorganization of society on a new and higher basis, prioritizing human need over private profit—that is the progressive and socialist transformation of society. Workers must break with defunct union bureaucracies and capitalist political parties to build rank-and-file committees and immediately begin the building of a new socialist leadership in the working class.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**wsws.org/contact**


© World Socialist Web Site