

22-year-old worker killed at Tyson Foods plant

Andy Thompson
20 July 2022

Are you a meatpacking worker? We want to hear from you. Contact the World Socialist Web Site to tell us about conditions at your plant and what you think needs to change. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Casen Garcia, a 22-year-old worker at the Tyson Foods plant in Joslin, Illinois, died on the job the morning of July 9. He leaves behind his parents, sister, fiancé, and 14-month-old son. The exact cause of Garcia's death has yet to be disclosed and an investigation by the Rock Island County Sheriff's Department is still ongoing.

The company is claiming that Garcia died as the result of a previously unknown medical condition unrelated to his work at the plant. However, interviews with co-workers, witnesses, and family members make apparent that Garcia's death was due to unsafe conditions at the Tyson Foods plant and that the company is working to cover up its role in the young father's death.

In interviews with local newspapers, Garcia's mother Allison Rose detailed the moment she learned of her son's death as she waited to pick him up from his night shift. After waiting for over an hour for him to come out of the plant, she called the facility security who eventually allowed her into the plant and told her that her son had died. Already by that time, the company had prepared an explanation, conveniently clearing them of any wrongdoing.

"I went to the guard shack, and that's where they told me they had found my son in the parking lot and he was already gone," Rose said. "They told me that it had something to do with his heart — an underlying medical condition." But according to Rose and others, the company explanation does not add up. "I came to find out he never was in the parking lot, and he never had an

underlying medical condition at all, ever," she told press.

Several co-workers also spoke with reporters. All asked to be kept anonymous fearing reprisals from Tyson for speaking out about conditions at the plant. "He died either from extreme heat exposure, ammonia inhalation, electrocution or a combination of all three," they said.

The workplace environment at the Tyson plant has garnered a reputation for being extremely brutal, with dangerously high temperatures, noxious fumes from ammonia used in the meat production process, and generally old crumbling facilities.

"I'm told it was 120 degrees in that basement, and Casen always talked about the smell of ammonia," Rose said. "Two days before he died, he said, 'Mom, I can't believe no one's died down there.'"

According to witnesses, when co-workers attempted to radio for help that a man was dying, calls for equipment repair were prioritized over theirs. It seems that upper management only became involved to keep production workers on the line after they stopped working out of concern. Many reported that they were instructed not to talk to the police about their working conditions.

Another witness to Garcia's death said that he was gasping for air before he lost consciousness and that he had one of his shoes removed, an indicator that he was overheating and desperately trying to cool down. Another possible explanation is that Garcia was electrocuted by a hoist wiring on a winch that was found near his body.

At the time of this writing, the coroner's office has not released a full report on the cause of death. The only details shared so far came from officials immediately after Garcia's death, who stated that they

found he had an enlarged heart. However, they did not state if this was the cause of death.

Garcia was known for being athletic and was a member of the Illinois Army National Guard. No other reports of Garcia having any heart related conditions have yet surfaced.

Deadly industrial accidents like the one that killed Garcia have become increasingly widespread in the United States. In June of this year, another Illinois worker, Steven Dierkes, was killed at Caterpillar's Mapleton foundry in central Illinois. The 39-year-old was working near a crucible with molten metal when he fell in, instantly killing him.

Last week, dockworker and Nicaraguan immigrant Uriel "Popeye" Matamoros was crushed to death at the Port of Newark when equipment he was operating fell on top of him. According to co-workers, management kept them on the job, making them work around the site of the accident without even having fully cleaned it up. That same day, a worker at an Amazon warehouse in Caret, New Jersey died of exhaustion during a Prime Day speedup. In 2020, 4,764 fatal workplace deaths were officially reported.

There has been an outpouring of support for Garcia and his family on social media. Family and friends from the community have offered condolences, shared memories of Garcia, and spoken to his hard working and kind character.

The posts also include demands for justice for Garcia's death sharing the hashtag #justiceforcasen. His sister, Katrina Garcia, posted on Facebook, "Our hearts are broken. I know in my heart if my brother didn't work at Tyson, he would still be alive today."



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact