

Veteran electrician Thomas “Tank” McAuliffe dead at age 67

Another tragic death at Stellantis Sterling Stamping

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7 October 2022

The tragic death last week of veteran electrician Thomas “Tank” McAuliffe, age 67, has shocked and saddened workers at the Stellantis Sterling Stamping Plant in suburban Detroit. The worker died September 30, reportedly after a fall from the plant roof.

According to Facebook posts, McAuliffe was a well-liked and respected worker. His brother Jake McAuliffe worked on second shift at the plant as a welder. McAuliffe is survived by his wife Cathy and two children as well as several brothers and sisters. The family has set up a GoFundMe page to defray funeral expenses.

Workers at the plant were outraged that production continued without interruption after the death of McAuliffe. One worker said that rather than send workers home to allow them time to grieve, management had actually increased the speed of the production line.

Workers say McAuliffe fell to his death from the roof of the plant, but many questions remain unanswered surrounding the circumstances. Why was McAuliffe on the roof, and how did he get access since the door to the roof should have been locked?

McAuliffe had suffered a stroke earlier in the year, according to comments by his sister Judy on Facebook, and he was apparently taking medications. Coworkers reported that he had appeared to be under stress.

In posts on social media many workers expressed their shock over the death, only the most recent in a string of tragedies impacting workers at the plant.

• In December 2021 Xavier Alexander, Kevin Railey and Omie Smith died, all apparently from COVID, following the death in October 2021 of Blair Alexander Braden, age 47, also of COVID.

• Earlier last year, in April, crane operator Terry Garr, age 57, died of injuries he received at the plant during a die set.

• Two days later, millwright Mark Bruce, 62, succumbed to COVID. The deaths took place as Stellantis was attempting to keep the plant running with a diminished workforce in the midst of the pandemic.

Facebook posts in response to the death of “Tank” McAuliffe were critical of both Stellantis management and the UAW. One worker posted, “If I understand a person with great stress and also a serious medical condition may have been allowed into a dangerous situation ... I do believe it is a safety issue. Management and safety have placed people in harm’s way. They have and continue to do so with me. I really liked this man. I believe it could have been avoided. ADA accommodations should be instituted and immediately granted to those with any medical issues not withdrawn due to company policy.”

The worker said, “Get rid of UAW safety and start new! Get a more aggressive quick acting team on all shifts! Get a team that patrols the floor daily for dangerous conditions. Get rid of existing management safety people too. Enough is enough.”

Another posted, “Working alone as an electrician and access to the roof alone are major safety issues at heights and with electricity. The roof was supposed to be locked and not alone. This could be avoided. We lost a very good-hearted person.”

For their part, United Auto Workers Local 1264 stated, “The accident is an active investigation.” But previous experience would indicate that the UAW and management are working to cover up the truth about the death, just as they have covered up countless other

workplace deaths at Sterling Stamping and auto plants around the US.

Over the past year production at Sterling Stamping has been sporadic, with various departments facing layoffs as parts shortages continue to disrupt production. The resulting loss of income has further distressed workers who have seen their real incomes decline dramatically due to surging inflation.

There have been a string of deaths at Detroit area Stellantis plants, many due to COVID, others likely due to overwork and stress. In May, M. Ronald Anthony Bandy died after his car caught fire in the parking lot at the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant. Many workers suspected suicide, as employees have faced grueling overtime to overcome manpower shortages caused by poverty wages and COVID. There were also reports of a suicide at the Mack assembly plant in Detroit earlier in the year.

In June 2021 a Jefferson assembly worker was hit by a train while driving out of the plant in the early morning hours, apparently rushing to get home after a 10-hour shift. The crossing is not protected by a gate. More than one year after the tragedy, the crossing still lacks at gate. The day before the death at Jefferson, a Stellantis Warren Stamping worker was found dead in a locker room at the plant, apparently of a drug overdose.

Perhaps two dozen workers have died from COVID since the start of the pandemic at the Warren Truck Plant, although the UAW has not been reporting the causes of deaths. Among those deaths was Catherine Pace, whose family has issued a public call for the UAW and Stellantis management to be held accountable.

Workplace conditions are taking a greater and greater toll on workers, whether COVID, dangerous machinery, lack of safety precautions or overwork and psychological stress. Every day 340 workers die from occupational-related causes, including injuries on the job or chronic conditions caused by exposure to unsafe toxins.

The utter disregard by corporate America for the health and wellbeing of workers has been demonstrated during the pandemic, as factories became vectors for the spread of COVID, sickening and killing workers and infecting the broader communities. Stellantis and other companies furiously resisted any safety measures that might impede production and impinge on

shareholders' massive profits. In this they had the full support of the UAW. What token safety measures that were finally adopted only came about because workers organized wildcat strike action independent of the UAW. Now the Biden administration and the auto companies have dispensed with even token mitigation despite the emergence of new, more infectious COVID variants.

The fight for safe working conditions will only be advanced by workers themselves organizing independently of the corrupt UAW apparatus. The building of rank-and-file workplace committees is at the heart of the campaign by Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman who is a candidate for UAW president. In a statement issued earlier this week on the deaths of Ben and Max Morrissey, who were killed in a fire at the BP oil refinery in Oregon, Ohio, outside Toledo, Lehman stated, "As candidate for president of the United Auto Workers, I call on my brothers and sisters to take a stand with me to fight unsafe and deadly conditions in America's workplaces and the ongoing sacrifice of our health and lives for corporate profit.

"In opposition to the coverup of industrial injuries and deaths by the corporations, government safety regulators and the union bureaucracies, I call for independent investigations by rank-and-file workers to uncover the truth and hold accountable all those responsible for the ongoing carnage in America's workplaces."



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