

Fatal accident at Lufthansa Technik in Hamburg

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14 December 2022

Incidences of fatal workplace accidents in Germany have been reported with increasing frequency during the past few weeks. The latest victim is a Lufthansa worker at Hamburg-Fuhlsbüttel Airport. According to the aviation news portal, aero.de, the worker was trapped by a hangar door on 2 December.

At around 19.00, an aircraft was due to be moved out of hangar 6 at the Lufthansa base. The 53-year-old man who was opening the exit caught his head between the huge gate and part of the hangar structure. He was so severely injured that an emergency doctor who rushed to the scene immediately pronounced him dead.

Lufthansa Technik and the Hamburg police quickly declared that “for the time being, no one else was to blame.” This latest horrific death, however, raises many questions.

For example, such massive hangar doors are normally equipped with sensors that react to movements in the vicinity and immediately stop functioning if a person is in the danger zone. Was this the case, and if so, were the sensors defective? Or was it the case that the equipment was switched off, for whatever reason (presumably to save time and money)? Was the colleague sufficiently familiar with the installation, or was he an inadequately trained temporary worker?

Lufthansa Technik is notorious for its use of temporary workers. During the outbreak of the Corona pandemic, the company laid off 900 temporary workers nationwide when permanent contract employees went on short-time work.

It is also well known that Lufthansa used the coronavirus pandemic to impose massive job cuts. The company received billions of euros from the government as part of the official coronavirus aid package, while at the same time wiping out 31,000 jobs.

The company’s technology sector was hit especially hard. When the sector resumed operation, workers confronted growing stress and extra work. At the same time, Lufthansa Technik was able to report a 7 percent increase in turnover to 4 billion euros and a profit of 163 million euros for 2021.

The major corporations are using the current crisis to increase profits, while workers pay the price in the form of wage cuts, increasing pressure at work and health problems. Increasingly, workers are also paying the price with their lives.

The fatal accident at Lufthansa is by no means the only one. There have a series of reports of fatal accidents at work during the last few weeks.

In the Duisburg steelworks, two serious accidents at work were revealed during the past eight weeks, one of which had a fatal outcome. In another case, after a worker collapsed and died at Amazon in Leipzig, the body was simply covered over with cardboard and operations continued as usual.

The accumulation of fatal accidents at work was already apparent last year. According to statistics from German Social Accident Insurance (DGUV), fatal accidents at work increased by almost 28 percent in 2021 compared to 2020, from 399 to 510. This grim figure—practically two fatal accidents every single working day—is undoubtedly lower than the actual total because even serious work accidents are not always reported to the employers’ liability insurance association.

Germany’s transport sector, which includes aviation, was already hit by an increase in accidents last year. The transport organisation BG Verkehr announced that the number of fatal accidents at work had risen from 61 in 2020 to 102 in 2021, an increase of more than 67 percent.

During the period of mass coronavirus infections this number naturally decreased, even as many workers died of the virus. In the years before the pandemic, the number of serious and fatal accidents had steadily decreased, but since 2021 it has shot up again. This year, the number of accidents has undoubtedly risen even further.

In construction, figures for 2022 were released a few days ago. They make clear that construction is a life-threatening industry. The Employer's Liability Insurance Association for the Construction Industry (BG Bau) announced on 5 December that 56 construction workers had died at work this year up until the end of August. This amounts to a fatal accident every four days in the construction industry. In the same period, 65,701 occupational accidents were reported by the construction industry.

The main causes of death are allegedly falls from great heights and falling building components. The more basic causes, however, include huge levels of stress and work pressure, fatigue due to constant extra work, and the lack of occupational safety measures.

On the morning of 6 December, another construction worker died. The accident occurred during bridge work on the A7 in the Petersberg area near Fulda, when a 38-year-old man was killed while using a technical device. A few days earlier, a fatal accident occurred on a nearby railway track. On 24 November, a construction worker was trapped between a track vehicle and a freight wagon near Fulda. He died at the scene of the accident.



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