

Stellantis workers speak out on tragic death of Mack assembly worker

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Workers at the Stellantis Mack Avenue plant, part of the Detroit Assembly Complex, are continuing to mourn the death of a coworker who died tragically due to a medical emergency on the April 6 midnight shift last week.

The worker, known as “Free,” was well-liked. The cause of death has not been released, but workers who spoke to the WSWs said they thought Free may have experienced a seizure of some kind, and that he might have suffered from health problems.

Many workers also said they believe a delay in the emergency medical response may have contributed to the death. It was widely shared among workers that it took paramedics 25 minutes to arrive on the scene.

The family has not released personal details of out of privacy concerns, but according to Facebook posts the worker was in his 40s.

Following the death, which was witnessed by scores of workers, the entire third shift at the Mack plant was sent home by management and grief counselors were made available the following day. According to information received by the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*, the worker was a team leader in the chassis department. His wife also works at Mack on a different line.

One Mack worker told the *Autoworker Newsletter*, “Team leaders are stressed out. You do the job of a supervisor and are in charge of manpower, quality, doing repairs on the line on your own. It’s a lower middle-management job, and you’re paid \$1 an hour more.

“They used a defibrillator on him; they said he was talking sitting up and then died. Everybody saw it so

that is why they sent everybody home.

“Workers know that management doesn’t give a damn about people, they just want their cars out. There is so much dying now. A bunch of workers from JNAP [Jefferson North Assembly] and Mack died from COVID. A TPT [temporary part-time worker] killed herself.”

In January, management announced a new absentee policy declaring that planned medical appointments and medical occurrences will no longer be counted as excused absences. This brutal policy forces workers who are sick to choose between losing their jobs or seeking medical treatment. An unexcused absence is counted as an “occurrence” by management. After four occurrences a worker faces progressive discipline leading to termination after seven “occurrences.”

Stellantis autoworkers are facing an increasingly toxic work atmosphere as management seeks to slash costs by cutting jobs and increasing the workload on those that remain. In recent weeks there have been a series of layoff announcements by Stellantis, including the hundreds of job cuts at Sterling Heights Assembly and the report Thursday of layoffs at the Warren Truck Plant. At the end of February, the company “indefinitely idled” its Belvidere Jeep assembly plant in northern Illinois, forcing some 1,300 remaining workers to either uproot their families hundreds of miles or face the permanent loss of their jobs.

Autoworkers have already been facing ongoing uncertainty as parts shortages have led to periodic and unscheduled layoffs. At the Mack plant there are thousands of temporary part-time workers employed whose pay is just \$15.78 an hour, lower than many fast food workers in the area.

Workers have also said they are confronting constant harassment, with management always on the lookout

for ways to force out higher paid “legacy” workers in order to bring in more temps.

The United Auto Workers union (UAW) has done nothing to push back against these conditions. When workers protest, they say UAW officials repeat the standard phrase “management can do that.”

“The union doesn’t even care. They don’t tell us anything,” a veteran Mack worker told the WSWS. “We ask about profit sharing, they know nothing about profit sharing. Or the plant closings, we have to see that on the news. Our union lies and keeps secrets.

“New hires are leaving. All the temps have been on 12-hour shifts the last two months. Amazon pays more than they pay here. Inflation is going through the roof. They don’t have a pension. They can’t pay their bills. They can’t afford to buy a car, they can’t even afford to buy food.”

A young worker at Mack said, “There was a rumor he had a heart attack on the line. They didn’t have the EMT or safety people on site. Every building should have a least two safety people. This plant is too big not to have at least two safety people on site to ensure that if something does happen, they can act as quickly and effectively as possible to deal with the situation, so someone doesn’t die. It is unfortunate for that man and his family to die like that because there was no one on site. My heart goes out to his family; he had two small sons.

“If they have the police in the plant there is no reason they can’t have an EMT on standby. They can afford everything else. That situation should never have occurred. Once you are dead there is no reset button. The things they do are backwards. It’s all for profit.”

The veteran worker told the WSWS, “The plant nurse got a pulse for a minute, but the paramedics could not resuscitate him. His wife works here also. She works on the same shift, but a different line.

“They do not give physical exams any more. People come in and have seizures and strokes, all kinds of issues. We have a lot of cancer patients in here.

“They had grief counselors on all three shifts. Everyone on our line knew the guy.

“They usually don’t like workers taking off more than five days for bereavement. The company for some reason thinks that people can get over losing their kid, spouses, parents in five days. I don’t know who came up with that number, but that is not enough. When

management loses someone, they are gone for months, but workers can’t get time off.”



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