

Workers must demand full investigation into accident at Flint GM plant

The GM Flint Truck Assembly Rank-and-File Committee
18 April 2023

Are you an autoworker? We want to hear from you about any safety issues in your plant: fill out the form at the end of the article. We will protect your anonymity.

The GM Flint Truck Assembly Rank-and-File Committee was informed Monday night that a young temporary part-time worker barely escaped serious injury or even death when a huge power-bolting machine fell from the ceiling and almost crushed him. Outraged workers told the committee that the machine, known as a prop shaft secure gun, had broken from its connection to an overhead beam before and that, despite their complaints, nothing had been done by management or UAW officials to make sure it was properly secured.

The incident occurred on the Chassis line around 5 p.m., two hours after the second shift began. The operator was using the power gun to fasten multiple bolts on GM pickups when the entire mechanism came crashing down onto the chassis assembly he was working on, missing him by only a few inches. The prop shaft secure gun weighs several hundred pounds and all five bolts connecting it to the ceiling reportedly snapped.

Co-workers who witnessed the near-disaster immediately came to the young worker's aid. At the same time, word of what happened quickly spread throughout several departments in the plant. Shortly afterwards, management paused the assembly line for a 30-35 minute "tornado drill," which many workers suspected could have been called to prevent a walkout over the unsafe conditions.

According to witnesses, management and UAW officials were more concerned about getting production restarted than the safety of the worker who almost lost his life. The worker was subsequently given a handheld

tool to attach bolts one at a time and the line resumed at the same pace. But workers gathered around the young worker, insisting that he not be used as a "guinea pig" once the prop shaft gun was repaired and reinstalled.

As the standoff continued, several workers gave statements to the committee making it clear that both the company and the UAW were knowingly endangering workers by failing to maintain the machinery.

"I'm not surprised it happened," one worker said. "They stopped doing preventative maintenance in 2016. They would shut down for two weeks in the summer every year. Now, they only come out to fix stuff when something happens. You'd think the union would care about this and have people come out but they don't. The committeeman on the line just stood up and clapped his hands happily and yelled 'good job' like it was a joke."

"I've seen the same gun break before," another worker added. "Not as bad as this but it's happened multiple times. The Ubolt and shock job guns have all broken several times. They don't come out and fix them properly. They don't care about us at all or our safety."

"It's insane that happened! The gun is huge and bigger than me. I'd be scared to use it if that happened to me. Management doesn't care if we get hurt."

Another worker told the committee, "You'd think with all the injuries, they'd do something. The guns break all the time like when one worker got hit in the head. It's dangerous and I'm scared of it happening to me. If one of them fell on me, I could die or get mutilated."

Another worker said, "We didn't know about the accident until we walked by it when the sirens went off for a tornado drill. I saw the gun was completely

broken apart. That was the aftermath. I figured they called the tornado drill to usher everyone out. It was weird. We were not told about the accident.

“This is a very big piece of equipment, a few hundred pounds. Maintenance is supposed to check all this equipment, but this gets overlooked a lot of the time. There are a lot of old fixtures in the plant—at least 10 years old, but they don’t take them out of service. I think there was another incident on Chassis 1 recently before this one. The union never does anything, leaving workers to be vigilant ourselves. I’m interested in finding out about the rank and file committee.”

Earlier this year, a temporary part-time worker was injured when she was struck in the head by a UBolt machine on the same chassis line. Workers who witnessed the injury said the worker was bleeding from a gash in her forehead. She was given a butterfly band-aid in the medical office and was sent right back to the assembly line.

During the lunch break Monday evening the prop shaft secure gun was repaired and remounted. After claiming that additional bolts and cables would be installed in the coming days to strengthen the connection to the overhead beam, management ordered the temporary worker to resume work. Local UAW officials signed off on this despite the continued dangers.

The deadly conditions in Flint and at other plants are the result of decades of collusion between the UAW bureaucracy and GM. The UAW has gone along with mass layoffs and the destruction of work rules, which make such accidents inevitable. The number of skilled trades jobs and classifications has been slashed, making it virtually impossible to keep up with maintenance and repair.

At the same time, workers’ grievances are routinely ignored by the joint UAW-GM safety committees, which are most concerned with preventing any disruption to the company’s production and profit. While GM made \$10 billion in profits last year and found plenty of money to enrich its executives and wealthy shareholders, the company is engaged in a \$2 billion cost-cutting drive that will only make the conditions in the plants more dangerous.

The GM Flint Truck Assembly Rank-and-File Committee encourages workers at the plant to maintain their vigilance and oppose the continued sacrifice of

workers’ lives and limbs for corporate profit.

We call on workers to demand:

- A full investigation into Monday’s near-fatal accident. Because no confidence can be placed in management or the UAW bureaucracy, this investigation must be led by trusted workers, nominated and elected by the rank and file.

- This committee must have full access to management’s maintenance and repair records concerning the prop shaft gun and similar machines and a record of all prior warnings and safety grievances concerning these machines.

- All incidents involving unsafe conditions, accidents or injuries must be immediately communicated to all workers on the shop floor.

Above, all our committee fights for the abolition of the UAW apparatus and all of its labor-management committees and the transfer of power to workers on the shop floor. To protect workers’ lives, these rank-and-file committees must fight for workers’ control over line speed and all health and safety matters.

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