

Death of Alliance Interiors worker: A case of profits over safety

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Workers can donate to Pablo Herrera Jr.'s family through Cashapp at \$MariaOherrera.

A production technician, Pablo Herrera Jr., was killed at Alliance Interiors in Delta Township near Lansing, Michigan, on Monday night, April 24. The 23-year-old workers “was heating a finished part to remove oils when the next cycle of a vacuum forming mold began. The victim was caught between an extended conveyor and vacuum forming mold, crushing him,” according to the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA).

“Put my shoes on, and left. I went straight to the hospital. Before we got any phone calls, I was already at the hospital,” his mother stated. The Herreras are hosting a fundraiser dance to cover final expenses Friday for a \$10 donation. The fundraiser will run from 6 p.m. to 12 a.m. at the Causeway Bay Hotel Ballroom in Lansing. Herrera Jr. was new to the job and was supporting his young family.

According to MIOSHA, “typically this type of investigation may take several weeks or months to complete.” The question remains, why are workers put in this position? Alliance Interiors produces interior trim and acoustic components for automakers and had three citations from 2018 to 2022 regarding safety. These were issued against the company for control of hazardous energy, also known as a lockout/tagout procedure. This is to ensure that workers are not handling the machine when maintenance needs to be done. The two cases against Alliance Interiors led to two fines of \$5,600. The first was scaled down to \$4,900 and the second currently stands at \$5,600. It is not clear if this contributed directly to Herrera’s death, but it highlights the conditions workers face when safety is subordinated to profit.

Workers from The GM Flint Truck Assembly Rank-

and-File Committee were informed 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. Following wide distribution of this statement the machine was remounted and management decided to attach an additional safety cable, which was not there at the time of the accident. Since then the UAW bureaucracy, rather than enforcing safety measures, has harassed workers in the plant and threatened them against talking to the *World Socialist Web Site*.

General Motors Lansing Delta Township Assembly is supplied by Alliance Interiors. However, GM Lansing workers were not notified about the tragedy at Alliance Interiors, just as they were never told about the explosion last month at alloy wheel supplier Dicastal North America’s plant in Greenville, Michigan.

A member of the GM Lansing Workers Rank and File Committee said, “A worker at Alliance Interiors was killed. Management said they did not have information. Even if they had information, they wouldn’t tell us.” As workers from Lansing and Flint stated, “They do not stop the line. [New workers] are told, ‘Here’s the job, do it.’ You don’t get the full directions for a job and then are reprimanded.”

When Alliance Interiors struck in 2008 the UAW instructed workers to stay on the job at GM Lansing Delta Township Assembly, even while the strike led to parts shortages.

There has been no response by the UAW to Herrera’s death or any attempt to mobilize support from workers at the nearby GM Lansing Delta or Grand River assembly plants for an independent investigation into what took place. The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* contacted UAW Local 724 President Todd Collins about Herrera’s death, but got

the response, “No comment at this time.” The reporter asked if there would be any report or investigation by the union. Collins again said, “No comment at this time.” The UAW’s silence on these issues is telling. While denouncing workers at GM Flint, they are complicit in putting workers in these dangerous conditions.

On the Indeed.com company web page, current and former workers described the situation at the plant. A former worker stated, “I worked here for a week and had to quit. When days they were short people, I had to work extra hard to keep up on the water jets, was constantly reminded to work faster when I was not able to. It gets very hot inside and all the water fountains are shut off requiring you to buy overpriced bottle of water from the vending machines. If you try refilling water bottle with sink water, you get sick. I felt overworked, mandatory overtime was terrible.”

“If you want to be treated like an indentured servant, this is the place for you,” a former line worker posted. “The employees were great, management was horrible, most were unqualified and only hired because they were friends and family of friends and family ... There was no support for production, they refused to maintain the machines or buy decent material so that production could make a good part right the first time, then they expected their production workers to fix all the parts on the line, which did nothing but hold up productivity, all management did was complain about numbers, while hiding inside their air conditioned offices. Expect to work every weekend even when their clients did not work, of course management didn’t bother to show up. They are a union shop that is useless, the union reps worked for the company and not the employees. I would avoid this company if you can help it.”

Herrera’s death is one of many such tragedies. One worker was killed and another 13 were injured at Schumann & Co. metal plant in Bedford, Ohio in two explosions in February. Another explosion took place in 2006. The plant is 75 miles from East Palestine , where a Norfolk Southern derailment and explosion was followed by a deliberate burning of toxic vinyl chloride, poisoning the region.

Moses Kur, a 37-year-old auto parts worker at Ventra’s Grand Rapids plant, was killed in an accident similar to those killing Wanda Holbrook in

2015 and Ricky Dora and Stephen Eilar in 1991, when machines cycled out of turn. Last month, seven workers died and 10 were injured in an explosion at the R.M. Palmer Company in Pennsylvania.

Last year, brothers Ben and Max Morrissey died from an explosion and fire at the BP Husky oil refinery in Oregon, Ohio. After six months the company was given a wrist slap fine of \$156,250. This is while BP spent \$2.75 billion in stock buybacks and \$11.7 billion in boosting share values for wealthy investors.

Appalling disregard of workplace safety is not limited to the US. In February, two mining workers were killed in a Dugald River zinc mine in northwest Queensland when their vehicle plummeted 25 meters after the ground subsided beneath them.

This is what capitalism has to offer workers in the 21st century. Like the preventable conditions workers faced in these incidents, 21 million workers have died worldwide due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was with the complicity of the capitalist parties and the bureaucratic apparatus of the trade unions. Now, with ending of “peace dividends,” workers are expected to pay for the economic crisis, rising inflation and war against Russia and China.

The increasing frequency with which workers are killed on the job is a product of capitalist society in decay. The fight to defend the lives of workers poses the need for the working class to take control of production. On Sunday, April 30, the International Committee of the Fourth International, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality and the *World Socialist Web Site* will hold an online global rally to celebrate May Day 2023. This will join the growing movement of the working class with the opposition to world war.



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