

Fires break out at Dana auto parts plant in Warren, Michigan

Our reporters
7 May 2023

In recent weeks, a series of dangerous fires have taken place at Dana Inc.'s parts plant in Warren, Michigan. The first of two fires took place on Monday April 3, 2023, and the Warren Fire Department was dispatched at 11:51 a.m., according to a report obtained by the *World Socialist Web Site*. Firefighters noted that smoke was visible from Van Dyke and 9 Mile Rd, over two miles south of the facility.

One worker told the WSWs, "Flames were high and there was a lot of smoke, but nobody could hear the fire alarm." The worker also stated, "all the exit doors were locked," though this could not be confirmed. Many workers were still evacuating as the fire trucks arrived—six minutes after the call for help was made.

It took the firefighters some time to gain access to the building and determine the location of the fire. They entered through Door 12 on the south side of the building and found the fire in a furnace/ HVAC unit on the ceiling near the Trans Van Line toward the middle of the 500,000 square foot facility. Firefighters noted, "a large amount of smoke and very high ceilings with smoke banked down 10-15 feet from the ceiling. Smoke was brown and light gray in color."

Firefighters were on scene for nearly two hours. A scissor lift was used to gain closer access to the ceiling. It was attempted to open roof louvers, but they did not stay open, so ultimately firefighters accessed the roof, and a hole was cut through the roof for ventilation. The offending HVAC unit was "overhauled with water to extinguish all spots."

Many workers on first shift were sent home early as the fire suppression coincided with the final hours of their shift, but workers on second and third shifts had to report to work for business as usual with no communication from the company or the UAW.

A second fire took place at the plant just sixteen days

later when a trash hopper caught fire. The sprinkler system extinguished the fire before the Fire Department arrived.

A Dana Warren worker told the WSWs, "They are testing fire alarms, but nobody could hear them at all. They said in our meeting recently that they are working on the fire alarm system and drills, but it's BS, and I haven't heard the UAW say anything. They had a union meeting on April 30 and said nothing about the fires." Another worker added, "The company and the union are one-sided. The union is just for show, if the company wants to do something, they will make it happen."

The significance of the two fires should not be overblown, but the circumstances immediately around the fires and the response on the part of the company and the union should be fully understood by the rank-and-file.

That the fire broke out in an HVAC unit points to insufficient building maintenance. The report from the Warren Fire Department documents that the rooftop louvers were not functioning properly and states that the item first ignited in the April 3 fire was dust.

Rooftop HVAC units are not only important for maintaining a temperate environment, but also for air quality in general. Proper ventilation is an essential aspect of preventing air contaminants associated with manufacturing processes. A building of that size is likely to have several rooftop units.

Ventilation is particularly important in the midst of a COVID-19 pandemic that continues to claim the lives of at least 200 people nationwide each week.

The other concern relating to the April 3 fire is the lack of an audible alarm and free means of egress from the building. One worker explained on Facebook how they learned of the fire, "no alarm, just people

running!”

When the confused workers finally did make it out of the building, they were met by firefighters ready to enter, but not knowing where to go. The fire report states, “Multiple other employees were asked where was the fire no direct answer was given.”

Workers who spoke to the WSWs did not know any details of the April 19 fire and the incident report from the Warren Fire Department offers few details. The ignition of a trash hopper suggests that there may have been welding or some other type of hot work that was not adequately controlled.

In any event, the occurrence of two fires within three weeks points to major safety concerns. While no workers were injured in either incident, the situation could have been far worse. Perhaps even more alarming than the fires themselves is the complacent response of both the company and the UAW.

The company is more concerned with blaming workers for bad parts or trash and other items found in parts bins than they are about providing a safe work environment with adequate breaks and meal time. For Dana there is no room to discuss the profit-sharing checks that are owed to workers when they have the unforeseen expenses of maintaining the HVAC units and alarm system or paying a so-called “containment company” to sort through parts before they are shipped to customers

For its part, the UAW has shown its contempt for the rank-and-file by remaining silent. The local leadership does not even bother to raise a question about any of the circumstances around either of the fires.

A fighting organization of rank-and-file workers would conduct an investigation into the cause of the fires. They would oversee the inspection and improvement of all HVAC units and ensure they are maintained in clean efficient condition. Fire watches would be established around all hot work processes and exits maintained free from obstructions. Responsibilities would be delegated for communication with first responders in the event of an emergency. That is the aim of the Dana Workers’ Rank-and-File Committee.

We urge workers at the Warren Dana plant to contact the WSWs for assistance in forming a rank-and-file committee to advance that fight and link up their struggles with workers in other Dana plants and

throughout the auto industry. Text or call 248-602-0936 to join and learn more.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact