

Alliance Interiors workers speak out following workplace death: “This should have never happened!”

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Work at Alliance Interiors or another auto plant? Fill out the form at the end to tell us what your working conditions are like. Comments will be published anonymously.

Coworkers of Pablo Herrera Jr., a production technician who was killed at Alliance Interiors on April 24, spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* recently on the brutal conditions workers face. The plant, near Lansing, Michigan, produces acoustic parts and floor covers for General Motors’ Lansing Delta Assembly Plant, including TPO vinyl floor foam.

Herrera Jr. was killed after being “caught between an extended conveyor and vacuum forming mold, crushing him,” according to the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA). As of this writing there has been no formal statement by the union or management on the causes of the fatal accident.

“Pablo was very kind,” one Alliance production worker stated. “This should have never happened! On the first shift, there are at least five to six people in front of that machine. Always someone watching the clock for the machine to cycle. Where was his team? We know they lack people on the third shift. There was probably no one spotting him.”

Workers at the Alliance plant reported that a similar incident almost happened prior to Pablo’s death. Management had demonstrated the TPO production and had workers sign documentation stating they were trained and viewed the demonstration, the worker told the WSWS. “MIOSHA signed off on the TPO vinyl floor, that was the piece Pablo worked on. They were supposed to give us safety features. A supervisor was behind the machine and stepped out just before the

press accidentally raised on him. They blamed the operator not the faulty machine. Management just called it a ‘dead spot.’

“We make \$16 an hour, why would we trust the machinery with our lives?” the worker continued. “The company after Pablo’s death said if you are not comfortable don’t run the machine. But then that Saturday, Jeff Church, the operations manager, told us if we refuse, we could find another job. An HR rep told us ‘that’s how production works.’ Then they used the documentation that was signed against workers to keep them running TPO.

“We shouldn’t be in this situation. The plant is full of temps and training sucks! We had training videos on tasks, how to use PPE, lockout/tag out, but it’s not followed. Management told Pablo’s sister ‘machine doesn’t run properly and people don’t know how to run it.’ Lot of people are not trained even on E[mergency] stop. I know exactly how he was he was killed. The gate should have been up during the incident.”

“I heard Pablo was a great guy,” another worker said. She said the operations manager had called for workers to enter the back of the machine, supposedly for lack of quality of parts. “Jeff Church made the call to take the torch person into the machine. Lockout/tag out should’ve been there. When the VP tells you to torch, cut, foam you have to do it. If you ask a team leader, you’re the last on the list of priorities. At the same time, I heard team leaders yelling at you to not go behind the machine, but Jeff did. He is unprofessional, screams and curses at us. He tells you to walk around the machine when it has about 120 second cycle time. One temp was fired for dropping an earplug!

“The union doesn’t do anything,” she continued. “Just like management they pick and choose who to protect. We came into work the next day and the union was waiting at the door for us. They told us not to go on the line and brought us in the break room to tell us what happened, saying it was ‘most heartbreaking.’ But they didn’t tell us who it was. They put up cardboard pallets to hide the machine.

“They don’t care. The company acted like they showed sympathy; now it’s like it never happened.

“Some of us make \$16 and temps make about \$15, mandated 7 days. The higher ups don’t understand what we do, they just want us to capture these production numbers. We get rewarded with lunch, not a day off. Our last day off was Easter maybe.”

“Since you distributed the newsletters,” a production worker said, “Jeff Church doesn’t even look at us.” In an indication of the company’s nervousness over anger among rank-and-file workers following the accident, management sought to prevent workers at the plant from speaking to reporters from the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*.

Dangerous conditions and disregard for workers’ health and safety are worsening throughout the auto industry, which, along with eroding wages, are provoking growing resistance among workers.

Near Toledo, Ohio, several hundred UAW members are striking at the Clarios battery plant. The workers regularly work 19 days in a row and receive monthly blood tests due to the high degree of lead exposure involved in the battery production process.

At the GM Lansing Delta Assembly plant near Alliance, workers reported that a coworker was sent back to the line despite vomiting and suffering from blurred vision. Currently the worker is in the ICU. As of this writing the GM Lansing and Flint Truck Rank-and-File Committees are investigating what took place.

Workers at the GM Lansing Delta Assembly all spoke out on Pablo’s death and conditions they face at the plant.

“Lot of workers talking about this, this is sad and terrible,” one told the WSWS.

Another worker stated, “That’s sad. The line was stopped for a few minutes. They need to get on the bottom of this.” When a WSWS reporter said that an independent investigation should be carried out under the oversight rank-and-file workers, he continued, “I

agree with you that needs to be done!”

Other workers at GM Delta knew Pablo directly or his family members and were angered by the news of his death. A seniority worker stated, “I can tell you stories about this place too.” Workers reported being sick on the line or injured and medical refusing to treat them. “Medical never takes anything seriously. Ice pack and ibuprofen then back to the line.”

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* calls upon Alliance Interiors and auto parts workers in the surrounding area to build rank-and-file committees at each plant and workplace, as part of the network of autoworkers rank-and-file committees. Such committees would provide workers the means to share information across plants, and democratically decide demands based on what workers actually need, including:

- A full investigation of Pablo Herrera’s death, led by trusted rank and file workers. No confidence should be placed in the UAW bureaucracy, management or MIOSHA, which hands out minimal fines while the companies continues to profit and cut workers lives short.
- No worker should be ordered to work in unsafe conditions. All unsafe conditions should be communicated across the shop floor, and the line should be stopped until resolved.
- An end to 7-day mandates and extended 8- to 12-hour shifts
- Full training and job security for workers, and hiring and firing only conducted by the supervision of the rank and file.



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