

Worker outrage over air quality crisis forces shift cancellations at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania

Mack Workers Rank-and-File Committee
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Workers can contact the Mack Workers Rank-and-File Committee by texting 717-739-9517 or emailing MackWRFC@gmail.com.

After multiple call-outs, Mack Trucks management in Macungie, Pennsylvania, was forced to shut down operations on Wednesday at its Lehigh Valley Operations (LVO). The company sent a mass text in the afternoon informing second shift workers that their shift had been canceled due to ongoing concerns about air quality stemming from the wildfires in Canada.

At around 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, the Air Quality Index (AQI) in the region surrounding Allentown, the largest city in Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley, stood at 451. This is far above 300, after which air conditions are considered to be "hazardous," the highest danger level. Outdoor events, waste collection and city hall office hours were canceled throughout the day in the Allentown area.

"The warehouse was full of smoke. I could taste it in my mouth and back of my nose and feel it in my lungs some," a Mack Trucks worker reported about the situation inside the plant in the morning. He added that "it smells like a not-so-good campfire" outside.

"It's definitely not a good thing" to be breathing the smoke, a second shift worker said. "I believe they should shut down until the smoke clears. That way all the people with different conditions will not be affected directly."

In its message to the workforce, the company gave the impression that it was shutting down the facility out of concern for their health. "Smoke from the wildfires in Canada is having a serious impact on our region," it said. "The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection issued a widespread Code Red air quality

alert which includes our area on Wednesday, June 7, meaning the air quality is unhealthy."

The claim that management was concerned about workers for safety reasons is a lie. Throughout the day leading up to the announcement, the company's representatives were asking everyone on the morning shift to work a double shift. Management then went back through a second time and asked how much overtime everyone would be willing to work. Only when they could not get workers to agree to stay did they cancel the second shift.

The last possible time for workers to call out was 2:15 p.m. Around 10 minutes after 2:15, workers began reporting that they had been told overtime was canceled, and second shift production would not be running. Only after 3:15 p.m., the scheduled start time for LVO's second shift, did the mass text go out, with Mack Trucks trying to save face and pretend it was acting with the well-being of the workers in mind.

Moreover, sequencing workers at the neighboring LVLC building were able to go home early on second shift, with no pay and no points, but inbound and outbound workers did not receive that same message immediately. If Mack was concerned solely about worker health, why wasn't LVLC shut down entirely?

The conditions inside LVLC during the day were "extremely smoky," according to a worker at the facility. "I can't believe they didn't do anything for us. Guys were saying their eyes were burning."

Workers at LVO expressed frustration knowing that their co-workers had been kept on the job. "It's wrong," said a second shift worker at the LVO facility. "Same with [LVLC] materials. It should all be one" when it comes to workers getting time off.

Despite the fact that bad air quality is predicted to persist until Friday, first shift production at LVO is scheduled to resume Thursday morning. This is an outrage!

The Mack Workers Rank-and-File Committee (MWRFC) demands that production be shut down at Mack locations in the region and workers sent home with pay until conditions are deemed safe by rank-and-file workers and health experts.

While management has sought to project an image of paternal concern for its workers, it has forced workers to work without ventilation or other protection throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This is despite the fact that several workers at Mack Trucks have caught the virus and died.

The United Auto Workers apparatus, for its part, instead of ensuring the safety of members, deferred to management to do the “right thing” throughout the crisis. It offered little resistance to the company and dutifully enforced its decisions, with company messages sent out with the UAW logo seal of approval.

The UAW is also overseeing continued production at other factories in the region where air quality is no better than in Lehigh Valley.

The Mack Workers RFC appeals to workers throughout the region and in all areas affected by the air quality crisis to form rank-and-file committees to demand that non-essential work be shut down until air quality is deemed safe.

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