

GM Flint Assembly Rank-and-File Committee issues call to action after life-threatening flooding and severe weather

GM Flint Rank-and-File Committee
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The rank-and-file committee at the sprawling complex of General Motors Assembly in Flint, Michigan—a local chapter of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees—issued the following statement after tornado warnings and simultaneous flash flooding forced workers to halt the assembly line and take shelter last Friday night. It will come as no surprise to autoworkers elsewhere that officials from United Auto Workers Local 598 seemed to have disappeared during the emergency—another compelling reason to build the network of rank-and-file committees whose aim is to abolish the union apparatus and return power and decision-making to the shop floor.

A call to action

Sisters and brothers:

The life-threatening emergency that took place just after 8 p.m., Friday, August 11 underscores the urgent need to build up the GM Flint Rank-and-File Committee and prepare to take back control over protecting our own safety and security on the job.

Storm drains backed up and geysers of water flooded the plant in many areas while sirens blared tornado warnings because of a violent storm nearby. The entire

factory should have been shut down and secured long before the situation reached that dangerous point.

It goes to show that nothing has changed since the Fain administration was installed at Solidarity House. Collusion between the union bureaucracy and management places General Motors' profit margin at the top of their top priorities, and our safety and security at a distant bottom of the list.

The National Weather Service had issued a flash flood warning for parts of Genesee County, including Flint, Burton, and Swartz Creek, earlier in the day. Moreover, it has been common knowledge for generations that our plant occupies both a flood plain and a location that is prone to tornadoes. The town of Perry in nearby Shiawassee County did suffer major damage when a tornado touched down that same evening.

For many of us on the line, the sirens were the first indication that a super cell thunderstorm was approaching. When it hit, one shift was at lunch, and some people felt their cars rock back and forth. Soon management came running and screaming for us to take shelter in the tunnel.

A worker from trim reported that management delayed restarting the line for 10 minutes after lunch, as if that would help us recover from the chaos that consumed our lunch break. "When the line did start, they wanted us back in the tunnel again because of another funnel cloud," she said.

Widespread confusion seemed to compound hazards that were opening up on every side. We couldn't take shelter because by that time the plant was flooding all over the place: final line, chassis, one motor line and the truck docks. Water was pouring through the roof

and erupting in geysers from drains that were overflowing.

Fork truck drivers refused to pass through the puddles because they could slip and lose control. Production was halted not because of any concern for our safety, but rather because the axles were not getting delivered to the line.

Like at the beginning of the pandemic, it was the concern for our mutual safety of our brothers and sisters—rank-and-file workers taking action to stop production in the face of life-threatening danger—that protected their safety and ours. The wildcat strikes in early 2020, at the first signs of the pandemic, saved thousands of lives. By contrast, the union bureaucracy worked with the companies and the government to force us back to work in May 2020 and keep us there pumping out record profits ever since. That’s when the pandemic took its terrible toll.

After the storm, we sat idle for most of the shift while supervisors scrambled around with brooms in a futile attempt to sweep water off the floor and get the line running again. It’s never our safety but the company’s money that makes them run. General Motors only cares about their trucks and that the profits we have created keep flowing to their investors.

A fellow worker described it like this: “Any time there is heavy rain, there will be large puddles throughout the building. Facilities attempt to keep up with absorbent mats like those in fuel spill kits,” he said. They use caution signs, but standing water is often left unattended for hours. Sometimes they will use trash cans when they don’t have proper signage.

Our committee demands a full investigation, under the supervision of trusted workers, into the roof leaks and the failure of storm-water drainage systems and the immediate implementation of the necessary repairs. Moreover, the warning system for tornadoes and violent thunderstorms must be reviewed and upgraded to provide timely warnings so that all employees will have plenty of time to find safe shelter.

Severe weather events in recent years have enacted a growing toll on workers in recent years, making clear the storm on Friday could have turned out much worse.

In December 2021, more than a dozen workers were killed in Illinois and Kentucky specifically because they were forced to stay at work instead of leaving when a massive series of tornadoes ripped through the

states. Six people were killed at the Amazon warehouse in Evansville, Illinois, and another eight killed at a candle factory in Mayfield, Kentucky. In total, 89 people across six states died from the storm system. Jeff Bezos, the billionaire oligarch, founder and former CEO of Amazon, has never been held accountable for those deaths or the many hundreds more who perished because they were forced to work at Amazon fulfillment centers throughout the world during the pandemic.

There are many other health and safety risks workers face. Flint residents are tragically familiar with the deadly Legionnaires’ disease. Now there are two cases at the Stellantis truck plant in Warren, Michigan. At least six workers died of COVID-19 at the same plant in 2020 alone.

It has been shown time and again that no one—not the UAW bureaucracy, nor management, nor OSHA or other state agencies—will protect our health and safety, except for workers ourselves. Real safety on the job can only be established if we organize rank-and-file committees to take control into the hands of the most trusted workers on the shop floor.

These events occur at a critical juncture in the struggle for better working conditions, secure jobs far higher wages and other improvements. Less than five weeks remain before the expiration of the Big Three auto contracts on September 14. We can no longer tolerate a situation of business as usual. Workers have the power to enforce safe conditions on every job and to place human life above private profit, but we must be organized to wield it. We urge workers to join this fight, get involved with our rank-and-file committee at GM Flint, or sign up to discuss joining or forming a committee wherever you work.



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