

GM Rank-and-File Committees respond to malign neglect by UAW bureaucracy and GM management in response to life-threatening storm in Michigan

GM Lansing Workers Rank-and-File Committee, GM Flint Assembly Workers Rank-and-File Committee
27 August 2023

Contact the GM Lansing and Flint Rank-and-File Committees by filling out the form at the bottom of this article.

Join the weekly autoworkers rank-and-file online forum on the 2023 Detroit Three-UAW contract fight, Sundays at 3 p.m. Eastern. Register here to attend.

Brothers and sisters,

Another life-threatening emergency took place Thursday night, August 24. An “Imminent Extreme Alert” was issued by the National Weather Service, warning of tornadoes throughout Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania. “Take shelter now in a basement or an interior room on the lowest floor of a sturdy building. If you are outdoors, in a mobile home, in a vehicle, move to the closest substantial shelter and protect yourself from flying debris.”

Seven tornadoes touched down. Warnings were issued in many counties throughout Michigan, which included areas where major auto plants and other factories employ tens of thousands of workers. This warning was virtually ignored by both management and the UAW bureaucracy. In addition to GM Flint, severely unsafe conditions developed at many other plants, including GM Lansing Delta Assembly. They kept the lines running, clearly putting profits of the auto companies over our lives!

Approximately 388,000 residents did not have electricity across Michigan on Friday. Near Grand Rapids, a woman and two young children aged one and three were killed and two others injured in a two-vehicle crash, when the two vehicles, traveling toward each other, hydroplaned on water. Near Lansing, at least 25 cars were damaged, causing I-96 to be closed. According to multiple reports EF3 and EF2 tornadoes touched down in Lansing, Webberville and Williamston.

GM Flint Rank and File Committee

Only two weeks ago, the GM Flint Rank and File Committee issued a call to action when another severe storm erupted on August 11. Storm drains backed up and geysers of water flooded many areas of the plant, dangerously gushing next to electrical equipment. Water was pouring through the roof. The nearby town of Perry in Shiawassee County suffered major damage when a tornado touched down that evening. We stated:

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

No workers have been injured or killed as of now, but our warnings of lack of safety have been confirmed again. These incidents are becoming more frequent and extreme due to climate change, and the threats are being felt by all workers. Over 1,000 are still missing in the Maui wildfires, while the fires in the Northwest Territories of Canada are threatening cities.

In December 2021 six workers were killed and dozens injured when the Amazon DLI4 was struck by an EF-3 tornado and collapsed. Plant management had refused to cancel production despite being aware of the impending danger.

A member of the GM Flint Rank-and-File Committee said, “We need to come together on this. Thursday night was like

a ghost town. No management around, no union around. They were probably all sheltering, leaving us to run the line. In the complex, only the assembly plant was not taking shelter, because we produce the trucks. We build the trucks which are GM's bread and butter. The next day, I saw Shawn Fain on his live-streamed Facebook event. He did not even mention the dangerous situation that workers faced during the storm the night before. Workers are livid."

A coworker told us, "No one came to the line to tell us that there was a tornado warning in effect. We heard tornado sirens only outside during break. These were not sirens internal to the plant's warning system, but the general ones for the Flint/Burton area. Throughout the whole time until I left work, like a few weeks ago, I never saw any union officials come out to do or say anything to us."

"When the sirens are going off for a tornado warning, we might want to take cover, but we just kept on rolling." Another worker asked for adding a tornado shelter near the body shop because it's "gonna take like 15 min to get to the front. Be dead if an actual tornado hit." Other coworkers took to Local 598's phone app asking UAW plant chairman Eric Welter why the union took no action Thursday night to stop production. Welter's basic response speaks for itself: "I am getting into it this morning," as if he was entirely unaware of the situation last night of a tornado that could have killed us.

Comments from GM Flint workers posted on Facebook show the growing anger over working in unsafe conditions. "We aren't as important as their trucks." Another worker declared, "They don't care about you, all they care about is that Mary (Barra) gets a paycheck next week."

GM Lansing Workers Rank and File Committee

Like our brothers and sisters at GM Flint, we were also being forced to continue work on second shift during the storm. Power lines and trees were knocked down, the metal umbrellas for outside break seating arrangements are mangled. We had a tornado warning years back where the tornado was a few miles from our plant and they never shut the line down or anything.

One coworker in the paint shop saw the wall ripped away: "I was standing next to the wall when it was ripped away and in the matter of seconds I went from shock to awe, to scared sh*tless, to, *I need to get the f*ck out of here*, to radioing everyone I could think of to get their a** to the area ASAP and figure this out. I think I need to put a safety committee call in tomorrow because if the debris would of

came my way. I could have been hurt, maimed or killed... The UAW said, 'the wall that was ripped away wouldn't affect production' and the paint shop kept working. The union just tells us, 'keep working it's not a problem.'

We didn't hear any tornado alarms on second shift, nothing over the intercom. We have taken shelter in the bathrooms before for drills, but not for the actual event. The next day we were back to work running like it is just another day, none of the issues were addressed.

We demand workers' control over production and safety. The GM Lansing Workers Rank-and-File Committee in its founding statement stated:

"Neither the UAW nor management has concern for our safety ...The organizational chaos and irrationality produced by the current regime is the result of subordination of production to short-term profit."

We urge all workers to join and build the rank-and-file committees as part of the network of the IWA-RFC.

This is necessary to protect our safety, our lives. Within two weeks, we have faced two life-threatening storms and the response of the UAW bureaucracy is silence. Fain expects us to have faith in his discussions with Biden, who is only giving \$700 per household to Maui residents, who shut down the rail strike and is preparing for World War Three.

- **Workers' control of production and safety!** We have already said the UAW bureaucracy and management have no concern for our safety. We will make our lives a priority. The rank and file must be able to make decisions to keep workers safe including, if necessary, shutting down production.

- **We must have access to information!** We need lines of communication between workers in different departments and shifts, within a plant, as well as between plants, in Michigan, the US and internationally.

- **We must have more easily accessible shelters that we can reach quickly.**

- **We must have a full investigation, under the supervision of trusted workers, into why we were kept on the line.** In Lansing and Flint no warning systems were put in place. If any investigation or safety measures are to be put in place it must be developed by us the workers on the shop floor.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact