

After ratification of UPS contract, Dallas-area UPS driver dies after collapsing in the heat

Alex Findijs
31 August 2023

Have you been affected by intense heat at your workplace? Contact us by filling out the form below. All submissions will remain anonymous.

UPS worker Christopher Begley died on Sunday after collapsing on the job while delivering a package near McKinney, a suburb of Dallas, Texas. Begley was 57 years old and worked at UPS for 28 years.

Last Wednesday, August 23, Begley collapsed while delivering a package to a local business. The temperature in the area, known for its scorching summer heat, was 101 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees centigrade) with a heat index of 108 degrees. Employees of the business tended to Begley and a UPS supervisor was notified of his condition, who then drove their personal vehicle to Begley's location.

In a statement, UPS claims that Begley refused medical attention "multiple times" and that the supervisor drove Begley home upon his request. Begley was given several days off work before going to the hospital on Sunday, where he died later that day. UPS was notified of the death on Monday.

The statement continues, "We are cooperating with the authorities as they continue to investigate the cause of death. We train our people to recognize the symptoms of heat stress, and we respond immediately to any request for help."

This pro-forma statement, meant to distance the company from any responsibility for Begley's death, means little. As is well known, the company does not employ air conditioning in its delivery vehicles, and heat-related injuries and even death occur every summer among its drivers.

Last summer, Esteban Chavez Jr collapsed in his truck while making deliveries in Southern California, where he was not noticed for another 20 minutes. Chavez was only a day from his 24th birthday.

However, workers in various industries around the country are facing dangerous heat with little protection provided by management. Such conditions are becoming more and more common as a result of global warming. Only two days after Begley first collapsed, Tony Rufus died at a Kroger distribution center in Memphis Tennessee, where local temperatures were also 101 degrees. Rufus's area of the warehouse was also not air conditioned.

In June, 66-year-old postal worker Eugene Gates died while on his route in a Dallas neighborhood. It was later reported that Gates, for the first time in his career, had been issued a formal reprimand by United States Postal Service management for a "stationary event" prior to his death.

Nearly 70 percent of USPS trucks do not have air conditioning and many lack basic safety measures such as airbags and antilock brakes.

At UPS, not only do vehicles not have air conditioning, but the company pays to remove the air conditioning units from newly purchased vehicles in order to cut down on the cost of fuel. The trucks are not ventilated and the temperatures inside the truck can reach 140 degrees Fahrenheit (60 degrees Celsius). One USPS driver demonstrated the extreme temperatures in their delivery trucks by cooking a steak in a plastic bag on their dashboard to an internal temperature of 142 degrees.

In an article published by *Quartz*, several UPS workers submitted pictures of temperatures recorded in their trucks ranging well above 100 degrees. One record even reached 161 degrees while another worker baked a tray of cookies in their truck to illustrate how hot their vehicle could become.

UPS claims that it takes safety seriously, spending \$343 million a year on safety training and placing fans

in 95,000 package trucks, but Dave Reeves, president of the Teamsters Local Union 767, where Begley worked, told the *Dallas Morning News* that one in nine UPS drivers suffers heat-related injuries in North Texas every week. “It’s a lot more common than you think,” said Reeves.

But responsibility for Begley’s death lies not just with management, but also with the Teamsters bureaucracy. It is significant that he first collapsed only a day after the Teamsters declared “ratified” a new national contract for 340,000 workers. While the Teamsters have called the deal “historic,” in reality it is a sellout that falls far short of workers’ demands. In fact, evidence is growing that the contract was pushed through with lies from the Teamsters bureaucracy, which claimed it has “reformed” itself under new General President Sean O’Brien.

The UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, formed to fight against both management and the pro-corporate bureaucrats, has announced an investigation into the contract and the methods through which it was passed.

The deal includes an agreement to include air conditioning on all *new* vehicles. But this means little given that the company currently operates 100,000 delivery vehicles and regularly keeps its trucks in service for 20 years or even longer. By the time the new deal expires in 2028, the vast majority of UPS drivers will still not have air conditioning. Moreover, the contract does not even raise the issue of air conditioning in the company’s warehouses, where temperatures can also reach dangerous levels.

On Twitter, the Teamsters issued a statement on the deaths of Begley and Rufus (Kroger warehouse workers are also members of the Teamsters) combining pleading with management “to step up and act accordingly when workers demand relief” with self-promotion.

The statement continued: “Last week, the Teamsters ratified our national master agreement at UPS that includes air conditioning in new vehicles, retrofitting of existing vehicles with heat shields, fans, and cargo ventilation, and a new safety and health committee to enforce company violations. While these improvements will make a difference in the months and years ahead, we had to fight like hell to secure them. Chris Begley should still be alive to experience them.”

This is a cynical lie. Begley, like most other drivers,

almost certainly still would not have had air conditioning. Begley’s death is a bitter milestone, the first of many UPS drivers to die of preventable heat exhaustion under the new contract.

Responding to the news of Begley’s death on social media, workers mourned his death and recounted their own experiences with heat-related illnesses.

“They have no problem instructing us to do something they want us to do,” said one worker. “The supervisor went to the business to see him. He saw what kind of shape he was in. He should’ve INSTRUCTED him to go to the hospital. He wasn’t in his right mind. [The supervisor] should’ve made the responsible decision, whether he liked it or not.”

“I told my manager I was getting tunnel vision and hard to drive,” said another. “Still had 80 stops left [on an] over 90 degree day. He told me to pull over and take 5 minutes in the shade. I was quite ill and realized how much they don’t care that day.”

Another added that “We have the staffing right now to send everyone out with max 8 hour days, the one thing they could do to truly help lighten everyone’s workload in the heat. But they won’t do that.”

One part-time worker said: “I wouldn’t be surprised if someone dies or gets seriously injured at my hub; the way they run this place is insane. It’s constantly understaffed, at least the package handling side, not sure about drivers but it’s brutal right now. I NEVER work with anyone and we never have enough people for more than 80% of the bays. Even on the days we had [that,] insane heat wave and trucks were dangerously hot. No help at all until the very end of the night. Watch out and stand with each other guys, [UPS] won’t.”

“DISGRACEFUL,” added another worker. “[And] everyone who settled for this new contract that mentions no AC, we just keep letting this happen... I want to rip out the AC units for those office employees and management and see how they feel.”



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact