

Dana Corporation workers forced to remain on job after near-catastrophic water system failure in Pottstown, Pennsylvania

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Workers at a Dana Incorporated facility in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, were evacuated last week after a burst pipe in their fire suppression system almost flooded the facility near a high powered electrical panel.

According to a worker, a pipe burst in an area around “10 to 15 feet” from a “huge electric panel,” which controls the furnace. “If that cold water had hit that furnace, it would have been a potential disaster,” they said. “The furnace would have exploded.”

The facility was evacuated for around 45 minutes. No headcount was taken by management even though four different fire departments responded to the emergency. “The building is the size of 15 football fields, and they won’t even do a headcount?” the worker inquired.

“I know guys that have worked here for 5-8 years, and they’ll tell you we’ve never had fire drills,” the worker said. Instead, the emergencies themselves have become the occasion for Dana Corp. to test its readiness. “I’ve been in three fire ‘drills’ here,” the worker explained.

The Dana facility in Pottstown, which employs around 400 workers, is one of the oldest in the country. According to the worker, around 180 workers were impacted by the pipe rupturing.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained when a worker from the same facility contacted it to report the dangerous conditions that persisted last year: “The Schuylkill River, a major waterway, flows less than a mile from the plant, and the area is criss-crossed with tributaries.

“This is a 100-year-old, chemical-soaked building,” the worker explained, noting it could become the “next Palmer” at any time, a reference to the catastrophic explosion in nearby Reading, Pennsylvania, last winter

at the R.M. Palmer candy factory which claimed the lives of seven workers.

The R.M. Palmer management was recently fined a mere \$44,000 for the preventable explosion, during which it forced its staff to remain in the building while a gas leak was present. “Seven workers will never return home because the R.M. Palmer Co. did not evacuate the facility after being told of a suspected gas leak,” an Occupational Safety and Health Administration report noted last October.

The Dana worker explained that OSHA had also issued fines against their own facility in Pottstown. “It’s rare that they check in and try to see if previous [issues] were rectified,” they said.

Dana Corp. has seen its share of horrific incidents, including the 2021 death of Danny Walters of Dry Ridge, Kentucky. Walters passed away after receiving a concussion on the job at his facility. The WSWS wrote at the time that “To meet demand, Dana is forcing workers to labor under conditions worse than the 19th century.” Walters had been forced to work 60 days in a row in the period before his death.

“This is not just a ‘Dana issue,’” the Pottstown worker explained, referring not only to the conditions in the US but internationally.

The potential catastrophe comes amid an ever-increasing industrial death toll among American workers. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that 5,486 workers lost their lives on the job in 2022, the most recent year for such statistics. The number is a 5.7 percent increase over the previous year.

This trend has increased in Pennsylvania as well. “More Pennsylvania workers died as a result of workplace injuries in 2022 than in any other year in

nearly a decade,” wrote Across Pennsylvania in January. The local news publication’s report cites Labor Department figures showing that 183 worker deaths occurred in Pennsylvania.

Company CEO James Kamsickas has over \$26 million in assets while starving his workforce. Kamsickas, a former member of Republican President Donald Trump’s White House Manufacturing Jobs Initiative, demonstrates the close ties between corporations and the state at the expense of workers. In addition, the treatment of Dana workers exposes the lie that Trump and other right-wing “populist” political figures truly stand for the interests of the working class.

Workers at Dana Corp. are fighting back against their insufferable health and working conditions, as well as the notoriously low pay the company offers.

In 2021, the corporation’s US-based workers voted 97 percent to go on strike only to be kept on the job by the United Auto Workers and United Steel Workers until a contract could be rammed down the rank-and-file’s throat.

“We have zero backing from the UAW,” explained the worker in Pottstown. They noted that their Local 644 president arrived in a Cadillac Escalade and allowed management to herd workers back into the unsafe facility even while it had no running water.

On several occasions recently, Dana Corp. workers have formed their own rank-and-file committees, independent of the various so-called unions to oppose the company’s abuses, which the union “representatives” permit and even encourage. The Pottstown facility became the latest to do so last year.

In its founding statement, the committee called for:

- **Elimination of the tier system at Dana. Keeping this system only makes it possible for the company to divide us. This undermines our solidarity and forces those of us in Tier 2 to work below the industry standard pay for production workers.**

- **Give us back our profit shares! We demand no more contract clauses which allow Dana to get off the hook from paying us for what we’ve helped make for it.**

- **Safety. We demand a regular, rank-and-file organized overview of the safety policies at our plant, as well as the means to enforce safety standards. If the company wishes to continue running machines despite gas leaks, we walk.**

The committee declares:

Our committee is in solidarity with workers internationally. It is impossible to fight global corporations like Dana in just one location or even in a single country. It is for that reason that we declare our solidarity with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). The IWA-RFC is dedicated to unifying the struggles of all workers, regardless of country or industry. This is the way a struggle should be waged and what the UAW leadership has forgotten.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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