

Dallas UPS worker dies after falling into trash compactor as company fatalities mount

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A UPS subcontractor died after falling into a garbage compactor in Dallas, Texas last Thursday. Juan Chavez, 68, was a vendor for UPS. At 10:55 a.m. local time the Dallas Fire-Rescue received a call about an “industrial accident” involving a person who “fell into the trash compactor at the UPS facility at 10155 Monroe Drive.” When first responders arrived they pronounced Chavez dead at the scene. As of this writing, no details have been released about the death of Chavez and how the accident occurred. UPS has stated that it is working with authorities to investigate the cause of the tragic accident.

Chavez is not the only UPS worker or contractor who has died on the job this year. In February, 46-year-old Dallas Carroll died at UPS’s Worldport facility in Louisville, Kentucky after being hit by a vehicle. He was also pronounced dead at the scene and few details have been published on the exact cause of the incident.

Last Friday, another UPS worker was killed while driving his truck. Expedito Cuesta De Leon, 50, was shot and killed in his vehicle. According to officials, surveillance footage shows a pick-up truck pull up next to De Leon’s UPS truck before driving off. Three hours later police arrested Rhean Fontanoza, another UPS employee, for the murder of De Leon following a standoff just 15 miles away from where De Leon was shot. Police stated that the two were “acquaintances” but had not established a motive.

Another UPS driver, Julie Reed, was killed in a car crash and vehicle fire on April 23 in Scotts County, Indiana. A three-vehicle crash on Interstate-65 resulted in a fire in Reid’s truck, though the exact cause of death has not been reported.

Deaths and injuries among UPS workers are a common occurrence. According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), UPS has

had the highest number of reported severe injuries between January 1, 2015 and May 31, 2022, at 1,142. This is double that of second-place Walmart with 571.

Many of these are the result of motor vehicle accidents. According to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, there were 2,943 crashes involving a UPS vehicle between July 17, 2020 and July 17, 2022. These included 1,069 accidents resulting in injury, 1,802 accidents resulting in a vehicle being towed from the scene, and 72 accidents involving a fatality.

Transportation, including trucking and delivery, is the leading cause of fatal work incidents. In 2022, there were 1,620 deaths from transportation and material moving, 30 percent of all fatal occupational injuries by industrial sector.

Workplace fatalities are down from two decades ago but have seen a concerning resurgence in recent years. In 2021, there were 5,189 occupational injury deaths in the US, down from 5,575 in 2003. Deaths declined to their lowest point this century in 2009, at 4,551, and stayed fairly consistent over the next few years. However, since 2014, deaths have steadily increased, with a notable decline in 2020 when workplaces were shuttered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Fatal work accidents rebounded quickly the following year as COVID restrictions were dismantled and economic activity returned to normal.

Additionally, such figures only account for fatalities on the job and do not track the thousands of additional deaths each year from prolonged exposure to workplace hazards. A report on workplace safety by the AFL-CIO, titled *Death on the Job: The Toll of Neglect*, found that an average of 343 workers die every day from causes related to working in hazardous working conditions. These figures do not include deaths from COVID-

infected workplaces.

The deaths and the even greater numbers of workplace injuries every year rarely result in any meaningful consequences for employers. OSHA fines typically only reach up to \$14,502 for “high-gravity” violations. If an employer is found to have repeatedly violated safety regulations, they can be fined up to \$145,027, but this pales in comparison to the profits companies can bring in from cutting back on workplace safety.

In any case, employers regularly challenge the fines, leading to their reduction. When the cost of a worker’s life is less than the cost of implementing meaningful safety measures, fines for safety violations are simply viewed as the cost of doing business.

OSHA also has far too few inspectors to keep up with the violations of employers. Including state partners, OSHA has only 1,850 inspectors for 8 million workplaces employing 130 million workers, or one inspector for every 70,000 workers. Even if OSHA wanted to it would be impossible to properly enforce all workplace safety regulations at every workplace. According to the AFL-CIO report, OSHA’s current workforce would take 186 years to inspect every workplace in the United States.

The increase in deadly conditions at UPS have been overseen by the Teamsters Union, which operates joint health and safety committees with corporate management. On its website, the company boasts:

Working closely with the Teamsters, UPS created an innovative safety committee platform known as the **Comprehensive Health & Safety Process** (CHSP) where union-represented employees work hand in hand with management to conduct facility and equipment audits, recommend work process changes and provide safety compliance training. There are more than **3,200 CHSP committees in UPS facilities globally and more than 2,700 in the U.S.**

Far from protecting the lives and limbs of workers, these joint labor-management committees are completely subordinated to the profit drive of the corporation. At the same time, they provide cushy

positions for labor bureaucrats.

The betrayal of the last contract battle by the Teamsters for a Democratic Union-backed Sean O’Brien administration will only worsen conditions. Workers have long reported that understaffing and overwork are the primary causes of workplace accidents. The deal signed by the Teamsters bureaucracy has given the green light to UPS to close hundreds of locations, destroy thousands of jobs, and replace workers with automation. A reduction in the workforce will inevitably be met with demands for higher work speeds and longer work hours, both known to increase the risk of injury and death.

According to the National Safety Council, the rate of injury for workers increases substantially the more hours worked in a week. At 31-40 hours in a week, there is an injury rate of 2.45 incidents per 100 workers. Between 41 and 50 hours the rate increases to 3.45, at 51-60 to 3.71, and above 60 hours worked in a week to 4.34 incidents per 100 workers.

Such figures can only be exacerbated by the corporate assault on jobs and the drive to extract increased profit from the working class.

Securing the health and safety of workers is the task of rank-and-file workers themselves. This means expanding the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee to transfer power from the Teamsters apparatus to workers in the warehouses and trucks. In every workplace, rank-and-file committees must oversee line speeds and health and safety, and reserve the right to shut down unsafe operations.

For more information on the UPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee, fill out the form below.



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