

One UPS driver dies and another barely survives after heat emergencies in Texas

Jane Wise
25 August 2024

UPS has confirmed that 37-year-old Luis Grimaldo, a Bell County delivery driver, died August 6 of what his coworkers are saying was a heat-related illness while working his route. Temperatures in Texas at the time were over 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

The company tried to claim there was “no indication of heat stress” in Grimaldo’s death even though an investigation into the incident is still underway. “Our people are our top priority,” UPS said in a statement earlier this month. “We have industry-leading training and protocols in place to help ensure all employees are safe while on the job and we respond swiftly when concerns come to our attention.”

Grimaldo worked as a driver for UPS for four years. Posts from coworkers on his memorial page speak of a kind individual who helped and encouraged them:

- “When I got the news, I was floored. I immediately remembered doing ride-alongs with Luis. Soft spoken guy who would do anything you asked of him. A Great Person.”

- “I remember loading across from you on green, you made it look easy all while getting slammed with boxes. You gave me a few tips on how to make things easier though I didn’t know you personally. The world lost a good person, there is more to life than work and more to a person than what they do.”

- “I have memories of us loading trucks on the green belt before we became drivers.. Always you had a smile, always listening and laughing at my rants, but you never had an unkind word about anyone. Never complaining about the job. Every time you had to come help me, sometimes late at night, even after you had a long hard day, you always had a smile or something funny or encouraging to say. Never a day would you walk by and not speak.”

UPSers took to social media to denounce the

company’s attempt to avoid responsibility for Grimaldo’s death on the job. Many spoke of UPS’s practice of cutting routes during the summer, which adds extra stops for drivers during the hottest months.

“I have said this for years that the company needs to lower the stop counts during the summer months,” one worker wrote. “But oh no, what do they do, they cut out routes and now drivers have more stops.”

“When I was a driver,” wrote another, “nowhere in the contract book said we had to make so many stops per hour. That was UPS’s deal to push you.”

The day after UPS announced Grimaldo’s death, video taken from a passing car caught the harrowing moment when a UPS truck from McKinney, Texas crossed into oncoming traffic and careened off the road coming to a stop only after it hit a tree.

It is apparent from the video that the driver of the truck was unconscious during the incident as it barreled past cars that were trying to avoid being hit. The driver was transported to a local hospital and was released the next day.

The unnamed driver was sent to McKinney from his own hub to fill in for a worker there. About midday, the driver reported to management that he was vomiting and feeling sick from the heat. The UPS manager told him to drive himself back to the hub in violation of the company’s heat safety protocols. That’s what the driver was doing when he fell unconscious behind the wheel.

The tragedy took place almost a year to the day that another driver from the McKinney hub died from heat stroke. On August 29, 2023, 57-year-old Christopher Begley collapsed on the job when the heat index was 108 degrees. His supervisor picked Begley up but drove him home instead of seeking medical attention. Begley died four days later in the hospital.

In response to these most recent heat emergencies, UPS touted its \$400 million safety training budget and its heat-safety Recharge guidelines.

“We regularly train and communicate on Recharge, our health and safety program that was developed in partnership with experts in athletic hydration and heat-safety,” the company wrote.

On Tuesday, Teamsters Local 767 met with UPS, ostensibly to put together a plan to prevent further heat-related illnesses. This was an act of theater.

In a betrayal of the rank-and-file demands for air conditioning in their trucks, last year the Teamsters ratified a contract with UPS under circumstances of deception and intimidation which said all vehicles built after January 1, 2024 would be equipped with air conditioning.

The average life expectancy of UPS’s brown vans is about 25 years. This means drivers will wait decades for new vans with AC under the current contract.

After the meeting, UPS released a statement, declaring that it has “hundreds of vehicles with AC operating on the roads today.”

Out of 100,000 package trucks on the road in the United States, only 6,000 of them are currently equipped with AC. Under the current contract, only 28,000 package trucks are due to be replaced during the life of the contract in the next five years.

Workers on social media reacted to the recent heat-related incident at the McKinney hub:

- “[T]hey just started to negotiate on AC for this contract and only in NEW trucks, not current ones.”
- “UPS needs to do better. All vehicles need to be equipped with AC, period. Not just new vehicles. When a driver says they aren’t feeling well, listen to them. He is very lucky for not getting killed.”

The last decade has seen the 10 hottest years since recording began, and 2023 set a record for heat deaths in the US. According to the most recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, deaths due to exposure to temperature extremes increased 18.6 percent in 2022, rising to 51 from 43 in 2021. Deaths specifically caused by environmental heat were 43 in 2022, up from 36 in 2021.

Global warming is the byproduct of capitalism’s inability to effectively control greenhouse gas emissions, and worker injuries and deaths due to extreme heat are the direct result of capitalism’s

insatiable drive for profits at all cost.

On Wednesday, Teamsters Local 767 held a rally outside of the McKinney hub in which dozens of picketers demanded air conditioning in the company's delivery vehicles.

This action is ludicrously inadequate to stem the mounting heat-related illness and deaths of workers, not only at UPS, but also at the United States Postal Service, Fedex as well as other industries.

What is needed is the development of a working class movement independent of union bureaucracies and the two capitalist political parties. Logistics workers must form rank-and-file committees in their workplaces to demand safe and humane working conditions.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact