

“They value the lives of their employees very cheaply”: Stellantis fined \$16,000 for death of Toledo Jeep worker Antonio Gaston

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The US Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has fined automaker Stellantis \$16,101 for safety violations that led to the death of 53-year-old Antonio Gaston on August 21. Gaston was tightening undercarriage bolts when he was caught under a vehicle moving on the assembly line and crushed to death at the company’s Toledo Assembly Plant, according to a Toledo police report.

The *Toledo Blade* and other local media reported that OSHA issued a “serious violation” citation to the company on November 26 after finishing its inspection into the fatal accident. According to the citation, “one or more methods of machine guarding was not provided to protect the operator and other employees in the machine area from hazards such as those created by point of operation, ingoing nip points, rotating parts, flying chips and sparks.”

The citation further states that Stellantis “failed to ensure that pinch points on the inverted IPF Chassis Delivery Conveyor were effectively guarded as it traveled through workstations.” It added, “Without the benefit of effective guarding, employees assigned with associated assembly tasks from conveying system’s work platforms were exposed to caught-in / pinchpoint hazards created by the carrier conveyor components, such as but not limited to: steel trolley wheels, travel rail tracks, and the vehicle hub assemblies as the conveyor indexed forward.”

Gaston was a father of four who was forced to move to the Toledo plant after Stellantis idled his plant in Belvidere, Illinois, in 2023. He was working in the part of the plant where the chassis and body of Gladiator Jeeps are “married” together.

At the time, a Jeep ~~Worker~~ told the *Web Site*, “Stellantis has been eliminating hundreds of jobs within the plant and combining teams. But the same amount of work is required to build the vehicles. The additional work was added onto other jobs, which, of course, isn’t good for safety.”

He added, “There is also immense pressure to eliminate down time and line stoppages, so people have to work faster to keep up. I’ve worked on that side before, and the jobs are extremely over-cycled. The worker who was killed was in stock, and they have eliminated jobs in stock also. It’s a sad situation. He had a wife and children. Now they are without a husband and father. The company doesn’t care about safety, only cranking out numbers.”

This situation will only worsen after the elimination of another 1,100 jobs at the Toledo Assembly Complex on January 6. Far from opposing this, the United Auto Workers bureaucracy has been complicit in the destruction of workers’ jobs, living standards and safety conditions. The labor agreement signed by the union in 2023—hailed by UAW President Shawn Fain and President Joe Biden as a “historic,” job-creating deal—opened the door for mass layoffs at Stellantis, GM and Ford.

OSHA spokesperson Scott Allen told the *Toledo Blade* that the agency’s investigation into the fatal accident was concluded, but the entire report is not releasable until the case is considered closed. If the company contests the citation before the deadline of December 20, the report will go to the Independent Occupational Safety and Review Commission and could take the better part of a year for the administrative law judge to adjudicate the case, Allen

told the *Blade*. This could lead to the reduction of the \$16,000 fine for the death of the worker.

“OSHA fining Stellantis only \$16,000 is a travesty, and I would love to see the actual report, as they usually have a higher fine for these violations,” Lori, the widow of a longtime Toledo Jeep worker, told the WSWS. “The government then allows Stellantis to negotiate the fine down, which shouldn’t be allowed to happen.

“As usual, Stellantis proves that they value the lives of their employees very cheaply. Safety is not a priority at Stellantis. Their only priority is getting Jeeps out the door as quickly as possible. I’m truly sad for Antonio’s family that they see how little Stellantis values their family member’s life.”

Lori added, “I know for a fact that my husband warned the company and union about that specific machine. He said there were safety issues that needed to be addressed ASAP. There were others bringing safety issues to light throughout the plant. Before he died, my husband was working on an OSHA report that mentioned numerous issues in the plant, and he mentioned that he wanted to try to save people from getting injured.”

In nearby Oregon, Ohio, brothers Ben and Max Morrissey tragically died in an entirely preventable explosion and fire at the BP Husky oil refinery. BP (formerly British Petroleum) was issued 11 citations, including 10 for “serious” safety violations, and fined \$156,250. But even this was too much for the multi-billion dollar energy giant. After contesting the citations, OSHA dropped three and reduced the fines to just \$125,000.

According to the latest figures available, there were 5,486 fatal work injuries in the United States in 2022, with the Bureau of Labor Statistics set to release the 2023 figures on December 19.

The death toll in America’s industrial slaughterhouse will certainly increase with the incoming Trump administration, which is dedicated to lifting all restrictions on capitalist exploitation of the working class.

Although he has not chosen a new nominee to head OSHA, Trump is reportedly considering former Amazon executive Heather MacDougall to run the federal agency, according to the *Detroit News*. MacDougall oversaw workplace health and safety at

Amazon from 2019 to 2022. A study by a coalition of unions showed that Amazon’s injury rate was more than double that of all non-Amazon warehouses in 2022. While Amazon employed 36 percent of US warehouse workers in 2022, it was responsible for more than 53 percent of all serious injuries in the industry. In 2021, Amazon reached a legal settlement with the state of California for concealing tens of thousands of COVID-19 infections from its warehouse workers.

Workers cannot rely on the bureaucracies in the UAW, the Teamsters or any other union to protect them. Instead, workers on the shop floor must expand the network of rank-and-file committees in the factories, warehouses and all workplaces, so they can assert their control over safety and working conditions and fight the ongoing attack on jobs.



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