

“Safety was out the door!”: Former co-worker details conditions behind death of Stellantis worker Ronald Adams

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The following letter was sent to the World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter regarding conditions at the Stellantis engine plant in Dundee, Michigan, which led to the death of 63-year-old skilled tradesman Ronald Adams on April 7. Adams was crushed to death by a robotic arm that pinned him to a conveyor.

In the letter below a co-worker of Adams details the deadly conditions in the critical engine plant and the collusion of the United Auto Workers bureaucracy with management. The WSWs Autoworker Newsletter urges workers to send reports on the conditions at Dundee and other factories by filling out the form at the end of the letter. Your identity will be protected.

When I first heard Ron Adams was crushed, the first thing I thought was this is what goes on when its launch time and they got to get something done! I knew Ron & he would not have done anything unsafe. We skilled tradesman have to open a gate to fix a machine & that kills the circuit. You lock it that way before you go anywhere near a moving gantry or robot! When it is time for launch and they are behind or something they sit up there & say we got to bypass this & get the line going or we are going to lose money every day. That is the only way this could happen!

Let me tell you about my experience at the Dundee plant. I left my secure electronic shop to join Global Engine Plant in 2005 & was sold a damn dream. They told me I was hired to work on electronic components. After about a month the truth hit us! We were told if we don't like what's going on & what's about to change, there is an exit door every 300 feet! We were forced to work long hours & overtime. Safety was out the door!

In 2010 they had a new launch & the assembly line needed certification. Chrysler cut corners & safety to

get Zone 1 certified. That was the line that I knew well, and I could get it going when no one else could! In 7/2010 they worked us like dogs! I was told to do whatever I had to do to make that line run in front of the sign off people!

We had an OP (Operating Station) that constantly went down. It was the crank line that installed cranks into the engine block which was built on the opposite side of Zone 1. It was separated by 8 to 9 steel stairs & a deck that connects zone & crank lines. Whenever a crank line robot goes down, I would have to climb about six steel stairs up with non-slip steel knots sticking up over the line. I had to fix the robot or whatever faults & then climb stairs again, then come back & restart Zone 1 again! I did this nonstop for over three hours. Then I fell on those stairs to the floor and onto to my left knee & shattered it!!

I could walk but my left knee looked like a grapefruit with all the swelling! The Zone 1 inspectors came to me & I told them that something broke on my leg & I need to go the hospital--now!! I was told: Please wait until your Zone 1 gets certified & then we will take you to the hospital! I was in so much pain I was crying!

They brought a seat out to Zone 1 with about three extra employees so I could instruct them on how to recover the crank line faults & Zone 1 faults because I can't move to do it! If I knew what I know now I would never have done it. But back then I was thinking my company cares about me, so I'll help get this line certified. Without Zone 1 being certified the rest of the line can't get certified because that line is the start of engine production & without our zone the whole thing shuts down.

After about three hours my zone got certified & I was

taken to the ER. My knee was X-rayed & there was a large chunk of it floating around tearing up my ligaments! The doctor asked “When did this happened?” I said “about four hours ago” and he said: “What? You should have come here immediately. You’re going to need emergency surgery.”

I got surgery in 8/2010 and was told not to go back to work until around 8/16/2010 after the doctor saw me and released me.

Dundee sent me an overnight letter stating I need to return to work within the next 2 days or I will be terminated! I was scared. I had never been in a situation like this before. I told them that the doctor has not released me to return to work & I'm on narcotics! I was told to report to work anyway and that I can tell people what to do with line faults! I told them I was in pain & on OxyContin & I would pass out. I was told if I fall asleep I'm going to be fired!

When I went back to my follow up appointment with the knee surgeon, he looked at my knee & it looked infected. The doctor asked me if I rested & elevated my knee like he said? I said I tried but my job ordered me back to work! The doctor said “I had you off for a month & you been working all this time against my orders?” I told him I was scared of losing my job! Dr. said” get a lawyer”!!

To make this short... I have not worked since this happened. The UAW did nothing for me! They allowed management to do whatever they wanted to do. Making me work on a dangerous factory floor with OxyContin in my system. They were threatening my job & my union was on management’s side! I told them how they made me wait to go to the ER. Since this incident, I have had 12 surgeries on my knee. The last one was 1/13/25 and they are talking about cutting my leg off now!

I knew Ron Adams & I have worked with him. I will be going to his wake! I got released from Dundee Engine Plant in 2013 after having about three knee surgeries. My union did nothing for me! This incident has just about ruined my life. I left a great job & 15 year career to join this company over a lie & it nearly ruined me. I have lost so much behind this, including my marriage & my family! My only surprise is that there has only been 2 deaths since I got screwed while I was working there!! I still talk to employees there & they still tell me safety is out the door!!!! RIP Mr. Ron

Adams!!! Damnnnn my brother!!!!



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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