

Co-worker demands answers about death of Ronald Adams at Stellantis Dundee Engine Complex

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Autoworkers are calling for an independent rank-and-file investigation into the death of 63-year-old Ronald Adams at Stellantis Dundee Engine Plant on April 7. The machine repairman was reportedly crushed to death by an automatic overhead crane, known as a “gantry,” as he did maintenance work by a conveyor line.

Funeral services for Adams, who left behind a wife, Shamenia Stewart-Adams, and several children and grandchildren in their blended family, are planned for 11 a.m. April 28 at Kadesh Baptist Church, 20361 Plymouth Road in Detroit.

In the more than two weeks since Adams' death, virtually no new information has been released to the public about the circumstances and causes of the tragedy.

The day of the fatal accident, Stellantis issued a perfunctory statement offering its “heartfelt condolences” to family, friends and co-workers and saying management was “currently working with local authorities to investigate the incident.” The company has provided no further information.

Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSH) opened an investigation on April 7 after its inspectors arrived on the scene. According to spokesman Mike Krafci, however, the agency “cannot provide information on an open investigation,” which “typically takes several weeks or months to complete.”

The only information provided by the safety agency on the incident was a brief description on the MIOSHA 2025 Fatality Information page. It reads:

On April 7, 2025, a 63-year-old machine repairman was performing maintenance tasks near a conveyor line. During the task, a motorized arm pinned the victim to the conveyor causing fatal crushing injuries.

The Washtenaw County Medical Examiner has not issued its findings on the official cause of death. A spokesperson told this reporter on April 23 that the results were still “pending,” and the office had 60-90 days to release its findings.

The United Auto Workers union has been no more forthcoming.

On April 7, United Auto Workers Local 723 President Michael Miller posted a statement on the local's Facebook page reporting a fatal accident “involving one of our UAW 723 brothers.” But it did not provide any further details.

“Information regarding this incident will be shared as soon as

possible,” Miller said, adding, “I am collaborating closely with UAW Safety and UAW EAP personnel, who are present in the building.” This refers to officials from the UAW International's Health and Safety Department, headed by UAW President Shawn Fain, and its employee assistance program.

In a similar vein, Chris Sharpe, the local union vice president, issued an April 8 post stating, “At the appropriate time, we will share more information to you all.”

Ten days after the fatal accident, on April 17, the UAW posted a small notice about Adams at the bottom of a graphic on Workers Memorial Day 2025, which marks the anniversary of the founding of OSHA in 1970. The graphic was not posted on the Local 723 page until a week later.

It said:

The victim, Brother Adams, was working in Department 7300 on a Cinetic Washer when, at some point during the maintenance task, the overhead gantry engaged, pinning Brother Adams between the gantry and the conveyor which resulted in fatal crushing injuries to the upper torso.

This incident is currently under investigation by the UAW-Stellantis Health and Safety Department with assistance from the International Union, UAW Health and Safety Department and the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSH).

This reporter called and emailed UAW Local 723 President Michael Miller on April 23 for more information about the union's investigation, but Miller has not replied.

The lack of information has generated concern among workers about a possible cover up. The day of the tragedy, Dundee workers who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* immediately raised the possibility that company and union officials had skirted basic safety precautions to hasten the restart of production at the Dundee Engine Complex, which is undergoing a \$150 million retooling to produce new engines and battery trays for Jeep and Dodge brand vehicles.

This was followed by a letter sent to the WSWS from a former co-worker of Adams who suffered a severe injury during a previous product launch at the Dundee Engine Complex. Posted by the WSWS on April 15, the letter painted a devastating picture of the unsafe conditions at the plant, and the negligence and complicity of the UAW

bureaucracy.

In a recent interview with the WSWS, the worker, identified here as John to protect his identity, described the intense pressure workers face during product launches. Production deadlines often lead management to bypass critical safety procedures, especially the lockout/tagout systems designed to prevent machinery from activating during maintenance. “The first thing I thought when I heard about Ronnie getting crushed was that they bypassed safety,” John said. “That’s the only way something like that can happen.”

Lockout procedures involve authorized skilled trades workers using individualized locks with name tags and photos to shut off machinery power before entering hazardous areas. According to John, who was a certified skilled trades worker like Adams, these systems are often circumvented under management’s directive to keep the line moving at all costs. “When you got deadlines and inspectors there, they’ll tell you, ‘We’re going to bypass this. We got to get this going or we’re losing money every day.’”

Union leaders like UAW President Shawn Fain, he said, “have been lining their pockets off us for years. When a worker gets killed, they look at it like, ‘Oh, that’s just another number.’ They’re telling us we’re going to do this and do that and that we should just shut up and go right back in there so it can happen again.”

Ronald Adams’ death, he believes, fits a familiar pattern. Based on discussions with workers still inside the plant, John suspected a gantry was involved—a motorized crane that runs along an overhead rail or “gantry” that moves heavy engine components. If lockout procedures were bypassed or improperly restored, any worker inside the area would have been at risk. “Once these machines go from spot A to B, anything that is in the way gets crushed. Flesh and bone can’t stop it.”

He explained: “They give you locks with your picture and name on it. You’re the only one with the key. That way, if someone sees your lock, they know not to start the machine. But if somebody bypasses the system and doesn’t put a lock back, and you think it’s safe—that’s how you get killed.”

John stressed that Adams, a veteran skilled tradesman and former aircraft mechanic at Northwest/Delta airlines, would never have endangered himself unless under extreme pressure. “Ronnie was a good man. He didn’t play around with safety. If he was in there, it’s because someone told him, ‘We need to get this line running now.’”

The lack of transparency around Adams’ death—combined with the silence from OSHA, Stellantis and the UAW—raises serious concerns. John called for an independent investigation by rank-and-file workers. “We can’t trust OSHA or the union. We need workers to expose what’s happening inside these plants.”

He also highlighted another tragic case: Antonio Gaston, a worker at the Toledo Jeep Complex, who was similarly killed on the job, with OSHA issuing nothing but a wrist-slap fine to Stellantis. “They fined the company \$16,000 and the company’s contesting it. A man lost his life. I almost fell on the floor.

“But now, everything is just hush, hush and nothing. They try to scare people but if we don’t get the truth, it’s going to happen again and again.”

John condemned President Donald Trump for cutting Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) staff and slashing funding for social programs like Social Security and Medicare. “Trump speaks for the oligarchy. Now he wants to cut Social Security. That money came out of our checks. You take that away, and people will be out here ready to snap. People are already living check to check.”

Fain has backed Trump’s tariffs based on the lie they will benefit

American workers. Instead, he is collaborating with the fascist president to re-shore military production and prepare for war against China. In his April 17 letter marking Workers Memorial Day, Fain deliberately concealed Trump’s plans to gut OSHA, saying only, “Every administration puts a different emphasis on different topics.”

John expressed support for Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker in Pennsylvania who ran for UAW president on a platform of abolishing the union bureaucracy and transferring power to the shop floor. He agreed with Lehman’s denunciation of economic nationalism to divide workers from their brothers and sisters in Mexico, Canada, and China. “We’re all working for the same companies, and we should fight together. These tariffs are going to create more Flints where all the plants are closed.”

John said he reached out to the WSWS after reading the article on Ronald Adams, “especially because of what you mentioned about the UAW being on the side of management. They go up and do all this negotiating for us and then they next thing you know, they have beautiful homes, they’ve moved up into management positions.”

John’s message to fellow autoworkers is that they must take matters in their own hands.

“We need real leadership, not people getting rich off our dues. We need our own organizations, run by us. They don’t want anyone stopping the machines when there’s a safety problem. But that’s the only way we’re going to live.”

He concluded with a warning to Ronald Adams’ family: “Don’t trust what the UAW tells you. Get the best lawyer you can. Get your own investigation. Someone’s going to talk. The truth will come out. Don’t fold.”

As more workers speak out, he said, a movement from below would emerge to challenge not only the corporations but their enablers in the union apparatus. “I know they’re trying to cover it up,” John said. “That’s what they tried to do with me. And now Ronnie’s gone. Don’t let it happen again.”

If you have further information about the death of Ronald Adams or want to join the fight for a rank-and-file investigation into it, fill out the form below.



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