

# One month after death of Stellantis worker Ronald Adams Sr.: Family, Dundee workers support call for independent rank-and-file investigation

**Jerry White**  
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Wednesday marked one month since Ronald Adams Sr., a 63-year-old skilled trades worker, was crushed to death at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Complex in southeast Michigan during the early morning hours of April 7. Since then, Stellantis, the United Auto Workers and state safety agencies have released virtually no information about the causes or circumstances of the fatal incident, aside from a few sparse details disclosed immediately afterward.

Family members are still waiting to receive Adams' death certificate from the Washtenaw County Medical Examiner. A spokesperson for the examiner's office told this reporter that the autopsy report remains incomplete, and that the office has up to 30 additional days to release its official findings on the cause of death.

In a brief statement, the UAW said the fatal accident "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 (MIOSHA)."

But one month later, the family and co-workers remain in the dark. "We have not been told what happened or what caused my husband's death," Ronald's widow, Shamenia Stewart-Adams, told the WSW. "Outside of condolences, we have not gotten anything from the UAW."

She said co-workers told her that Adams was widely respected as a highly skilled tradesman and a fierce advocate for safety inside the plant. "Ronnie worked at Dundee for 19 years, and many of his co-workers had become like family," she said. "They'll tell you firsthand that my husband knew safety better than the head of safety at the plant. They're all outraged at what happened, how it happened and the unsafe conditions they have to work in. They're angry over how many times they have written up a machine and nothing was done about it."

Before working at Dundee, Ronald spent 16 years as an aircraft mechanic at Northwest/Delta. "He would tell me that there are planes that go up in the air to this day with my signature still on them," she said. After transferring to the engine complex, he "fought hard to earn his license" as a machine repairman—a process that required years of study and practical experience to obtain a UAW Journeyman Card for a Mechanical Journeyperson, certifying his expertise in the trade.

To his co-workers, Shamenia said, her husband was "a protector of the plant, a big brother and well respected. He used to have rough, raw

conversations over safety with some supervisors. If they asked him to do something dangerous, he would tell them, 'I'm not going to do that. You get safety over here, and I'll do my job.' He didn't care if he got fired or let go. He did his job well, and my husband was just as qualified as an engineer."

## **For an independent investigation by rank-and-file workers**

Shamenia and other family members told the WSWS they supported the call for an independent investigation by rank-and-file workers, citing concerns about a potential cover-up. "If we don't speak out against these corporations," Shamenia said, "it's going to be other families losing their loved ones."

Ronald's sister, Shevaughn, who retired from the US Postal Service after 33 years, said, "If the truth doesn't come out, it's going to repeat itself. Dundee workers have to stick together and hold their own investigation. With the union trying to cut them down, I can see the difficulty and why workers would feel hesitant, but I also know the workers know it is right to say something."

"You've got to know that if it was done to him, unfortunately, you or someone else is going to be next," Shevaughn added. "The company was cutting back on safety. It's sad—workers are just trying to make a living, and these companies are just looking after their bottom line."

"In the post office, we used to say they're trying to kill us, so that you won't be around to collect your first retirement check. I know several letter carriers who suffered that fate. I stood up for safety, and I even bucked the union. Workers should be in charge of safety, because they're the ones in there every day."

Shevaughn urged Dundee workers to come forward and expose the truth. "Just know one thing: You work better in a group. When they try to break the chain, when deception comes in, you have to stay together like a fist. Let them know they can't intimidate or dangle money in front of you to shut you up. If you stay together, they can't break that fist."

## UAW apparatus sides with corporate management

Any investigation carried out by the company or the UAW would serve only to exonerate themselves and shift blame onto the victim. Both the auto companies and the UAW bureaucracy are complicit in sacrificing workers' lives for corporate profit.

As for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the federal agency and its state affiliates are being gutted by the Trump administration. Even with current funding, OSHA defers to the labor-management "safety partnership" between the UAW and the auto companies.

When Stellantis worker Antonio Gaston was killed at the Toledo Jeep plant just nine months before Adams' death, OSHA imposed a paltry \$16,000 fine. To add insult to injury, the multi-billion-dollar corporation challenged the penalty.

An indication of the cover-up in progress was the crude Workers Memorial Day video posted by the UAW on April 28. The five-minute video featured two Stellantis North America executives and Kevin Gotinsky, director of the UAW Stellantis Department.

Released on the very day that hundreds of family members, coworkers and friends gathered in Detroit to bury Ronald Adams Sr., the video praised the "joint efforts" of the company and the union to create a "safe workplace." It implied that accidents were caused by careless workers—not by management's relentless speed-up and cost-cutting.

Gotinsky gushed that UAW officials "regularly engage with management to address and resolve issues as they arise." But making safe decisions, he said, was ultimately the responsibility of "every UAW member."

Tim Fallon, Stellantis Senior Vice President of Manufacturing for North America, cynically declared in the video: "A review of past incidents indicates that unsafe acts are a leading cause of injury. ... A shortcut may save you a moment of time, but it could lead to a lifetime of consequences."

This is nothing but a slander against the workers. At the Dundee plant, workers have long complained about hazardous conditions and the complicity of the UAW bureaucracy in enforcing them. The plant is currently undergoing retooling to prepare for the launch of key gas-powered, electric, and hybrid engines for Dodge and Jeep vehicles. As one veteran worker who was injured during a previous product launch explained, during ramp-up periods, "Safety is out the door!"

Workers have already reported that the company may have quietly fired the plant manager, Adams' direct supervisor and the UAW health and safety representative in an attempt to cover up what happened. There are also growing concerns among workers that critical evidence of criminal negligence may be tampered with or destroyed.

## What is known so far about the fatal incident

While Stellantis, the UAW and state authorities have released few details, the limited information that has emerged paints a disturbing picture of the events leading to Adams' death.

According to the UAW's April 28 statement, 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."

As John, a former co-worker of Adams, explained: "The gantry is a crane, seven or eight feet long, that picks up engine blocks and moves them over to drop them into the washer. The whole area is caged—you can't walk into it while that thing is moving. If it stops, the whole operation stops. But to fix it, you have to lock it out. Once the skilled trades worker opens the gate, the power is turned off and he puts his lock on it so it can't reengage."

"But somehow the lockout was bypassed," John added. "It'd be hot, steamy, dark in there. If the gantry reengaged while Ronnie was leaning over that line, and it tried to pick five engine blocks up, he would have been crushed to death."

"If management bypassed the safety precautions, there would be a record of it in the factory's IT system. During start-up, management has records from every station that goes down—how many times it went down, how long it was down, the time of day, the shift. All of that is there. And there's a lot of damn information."

"They would want to scrub that information because this is a death now, and you can bet after the one that happened in Toledo at the Jeep plant, they're trying to make sure nothing comes out about this. Because if it does, it could change everything."

"Now that people see the family demanding to know what happened, there are going to be workers saying, 'Come on y'all, let's get behind this. It's time now, this time, to know the truth, instead of another death with nothing happening.' They are going to want to make it better for themselves and have control. I'm pretty sure that's what they want."

The death of Ronald Adams Sr. has raised urgent questions. The silence from the company and the union only underscores the need for workers to take matters into their own hands. The only way to uncover the truth and hold those responsible to account is through the formation of an independent rank-and-file committee, composed of trusted co-workers and supported by the broader working class.

*Are you a Dundee Engine worker? Fill out the form below and provide what information you have about conditions at the plant. All submissions will be kept anonymous.*



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