

Autoworkers back call for independent investigation into the death of Dundee Engine worker Ronald Adams Sr.

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9 May 2025

Autoworkers are responding enthusiastically to the call for an independent rank-and-file investigation into the death of Stellantis Dundee Engine worker Ronald Adams Sr., who was crushed to death on the job while repairing machinery on April 7.

One month after Adams' death, family and co-workers remain in the dark on to the circumstances of this tragedy. The family has yet to even receive a death certificate from the Washtenaw County Medical Examiner. Neither has information been communicated by the UAW, plant management or state safety investigators.

The plant, located in the small town of Dundee, west of Monroe in southeast Michigan, is currently undergoing retooling for production of engines and frame components for a new generation of gas-powered, hybrid and electric vehicles.

Co-workers say Adams, a 19-year plant veteran, was well-respected in the plant and known as an outspoken advocate for workplace safety. They said that management routinely ignored complaints about unsafe machinery in the plant.

Joint UAW-management safety committees are notorious for taking the side of management, typically seeking to shift the blame for deaths or injuries onto the backs of workers. Investigations carried out by the government safety agencies, such as the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA), are usually whitewashes. Even in the cases where fines are levied, they are normally only token amounts and are often reversed on appeal.

Such was the case with the death last summer of Antonio Gaston, who was crushed to death while working on the line at the Toledo Jeep Assembly Complex. OSHA levied a fine of just \$16,000 for unsafe conditions contributing to the death of Gaston.

Further, OSHA is being dismantled by the massive cuts being carried out by the Trump administration and billionaire budget-cutter Elon Musk.

Therefore, if the truth is to be uncovered, it is up to rank-and-file workers to take the initiative.

Shamena Stewart Adams, Ronald's widow, told the *World Socialist Web Site*:

If we don't speak out against these corporations, there's going to be other families losing their loved ones.

A veteran Detroit autoworker, who has followed the case on the WSWs, gave the following statement:

The death of Brother Ronald Adams is a tragedy that all union workers feel the deepest sympathy. Safety in the workplace has to be the highest priority, including through awareness, training, and transparency. The family of Brother Adams deserves the full cooperation of the company and the IUAW [International UAW, the union's top leadership], but unfortunately this has not been the case.

Therefore, a complete investigation into the circumstances surrounding this heart-wrenching accident by a committee of workers has to be conducted. A complete report on the facts with full transparency divorced from corporate cover-up and union corporate collaboration must be rendered. The family of Brother Adams demands to know the truth, and workers from all over the globe stand in unison with their demands to know the truth.

Many Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) workers, who spoke to WSWs reporters during their shift change Thursday afternoon, were aware of and concerned over Adams' death. Many expressed scorn for UAW officials, including UAW President Shawn Fain, for allowing management to kill and injure workers.

"You can pass out and they'll roll you over to the side to keep the line running," one second shift worker said as he rushed through the turnstile. Another explained that Stellantis has recently put a new mechanical system in one part of the plant, "and even if the skilled trades locked out the area, management could bypass it, and the machinery could still operate even if someone was in there."

Another worker looked at the picture of Adams and his family and said:

This is terrible. He had a wife and kids. None of this should be happening. All we want to do is be able to come

home every day the same way we came in.

Another SHAP worker said:

An investigation needs to be done. If there was anything suspicious, it needs to be looked in to.

When told that the UAW was stonewalling the family, another worker said, “That’s what they always do. The UAW wants to protect their own behinds.”

A veteran SHAP worker with more than three decades in the plant related her experiences:

A few years ago, a few of us were brought in to clean out the cells [a caged area with automated machinery] because they were full of soot and grease and oil. It was during downtime on the weekend. The floors were trash, and they had to put on their dog and pony show for somebody from corporate [coming to the plant].

A guy comes and unlocks the cell door and says, “You’re good to go.” Then about an hour later, a skilled trades guy who knew us personally and had worked with us for a long time said, “What are you doing in there? That’s not locked out?” He said, “Let me get that. You guys, come on out while I do the lockout.”

Nobody had their key on it. The first guy just opened the cell and said the power was cut off to the system. I was eyeing it sideways, like, something sounds suspicious, but we don’t know, we don’t have that depth of information. We’re just told by management to clean it, right? And we were told by the guy that it’s locked out, and I don’t think it was.

What if the power did come on all of a sudden? What if somebody didn’t know we were around the corner, working on the equipment, or cleaning around that robot or conveyor? What if we were wiping it down and mopping underneath it and they didn’t know we were in there?

We were dusting it off because they wanted to look as clean as possible for the tour group that usually comes through. So, yeah, we could have been killed. You want to protect yourself from what could happen. Ronald Adams must have believed he was safe. But it could have been like us until we were told not to go in there again.

The UAW-Stellantis safety committees are like a buffer between yes and no. Between go and no-go. But I noticed with this company, they always like to point the finger of blame on the worker. They want to put the fire out after it started. They don’t do preventative maintenance in here whatsoever.

How long is it going to be before somebody else gets hurt

or killed because they assume they’re OK or are being rushed? It’s hard for these skilled trades workers to be split up into different areas. They are always in a mode of thinking and trouble-shooting the system. There should be some type of buddy system. Put one at the gate, another at the door, one at the lockout, and another person could perform the work. What they call “spotters.” What is so hard about that?

She discussed how decades of concessions by the UAW had severely undermined safety, saying she sees skilled tradespersons working alone a lot.

We’re more or less a sweatshop in here. When I started here in the 1990s, the union used to come up and ask us what management was doing and what we needed the union to do. Now, the union goes to management first, and then right away, we’re accused of whatever they want to accuse us of. Or the union will be like, “the company can do that.”

Well, you know, I say, “Wait a minute, I pay union dues.” I don’t get it. The union officials embezzled all that money that was supposed to be for training in safety and other things. They just took it. We never got it back.

They used it to buy luxury shoes for their wives and their mistresses. I went up to Black Lake [UAW resort in Michigan], and I found one of those shoes in the sand. I don’t know how this woman lost her shoe, but she said, “Give that to me, that’s mine.” It must have been one of those \$1,000 a pair shoes, and she thought I was probably going to sell it.

Asked about forming a rank-and-file committee to investigate Ronnie Adams’ death, a younger SHAP worker said:

I see nothing wrong with that. We would have more say-so in what is going on instead of leaving it to the powers that be. I feel like our word doesn’t even count.

Look at the contract we just got. A lot of us voted “No,” but somehow it still passed. I would like to see more power come back to the people.

Are you an autoworker? Tell us about conditions at your plant, fill out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.



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