

# Continuing injuries at Stellantis and StarPlus plant expose UAW's claim of an EV "just transition"

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*Do you work at StarPlus Energy? Let us know about conditions at your plant by filling out the form at the bottom of the page. All submissions will be kept anonymous.*

Workers at StarPlus Energy, a joint venture between Stellantis and Samsung SDI in Kokomo, Indiana, have taken to social media to expose dangerous working conditions inside the facility.

Less than two years after the sellout 2023 Stellantis contract negotiated by the United Auto Workers (UAW), workers continue to suffer job cuts and hazardous conditions. Despite UAW President Shawn Fain's promises of a "just transition" to electric vehicle (EV) production, injuries and deaths on the job continue.

While Fain and President Biden publicly championed a "just transition" to electric vehicles during contract negotiations, their real focus was securing the UAW's right to collect dues from workers at new EV plants—not ensuring those workers were fairly compensated or safe. In return, automakers were assured by the UAW that union leadership would not disrupt the flow of profits.

In January 2024, Stellantis Kokomo workers received a letter stating they would be leased and "represented" by the UAW. The letter from StarPlus management read:

All hourly employees of StarPlus Energy will be separated. Concurrently, all employees will be offered full-time employment by Stellantis, which will then lease your services back to StarPlus Energy under our new employment

arrangement.

Despite this, workers at Stellantis Kokomo report confusion over whether a contract was ever finalized or implemented.

A StarPlus worker told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*:

"There's no medical emergency response, no safety data sheets, no workers' comp doctors. Injured people have to climb four flights of stairs—elevators aren't allowed. And if you speak up, you get targeted."

Another worker, reflecting on the 2023 contract, said, "It was a raw deal sold to the members." When asked about union representation for leased employees, one responded, "Representation isn't even allowed on-site."

There is growing anger among rank-and-file workers over low pay, overwork, and unsafe conditions. But far from protecting workers, the UAW has enabled management by prioritizing dues collection and profit preservation.

Joint UAW-management safety committees are more about covering up issues than investigating them. These committees routinely shift blame onto workers. Even when the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) investigates, penalties are minimal. In 2024, Stellantis was fined only \$16,000 after the death of Antonio Gaston, who was crushed by a moving vehicle at the Toledo Jeep complex.

In April of this year, Ronald Adams Sr., a skilled trades worker at Stellantis Dundee Engine with 19 years of experience, was crushed while retooling a machine. Adams' family has received no information

from Stellantis, the UAW, or state authorities.

This pattern of neglect isn't limited to Stellantis. At Ford's BlueOval SK battery plant in Kentucky, a worker was fired for exposing safety violations. The UAW's only response was a weak appeal for Ford to "let them vote" on representation—offering no real opposition.

At Clarios battery in Holland, Ohio, 500 workers went on strike in 2023, only for the UAW to shut it down after one month. The result was a management-friendly contract that cut real wages and forced 12-hour shifts without overtime pay. One worker told the WSWS, "We don't get any compensation for working in conditions that give retirees cancer shortly after they leave."

In another case, Pablo Herrera Jr., a production technician at Alliance Interiors in Delta Township, Michigan, died in 2023 during a routine task. The UAW provided no update on the investigation and told the family simply: "No comment."

Following the death of Ronald Adams, a member of the Stellantis Kokomo Rank-and-File Committee detailed further abuses:

A guy got a hernia a few weeks ago lifting something. They sent him to day shift for a week so he could clock in, then leave for surgery—just to avoid reporting lost time. Same with a woman who needed carpal tunnel surgery. They made her clock in, then leave. It's about hiding injuries, not helping us.

They're changing lockout procedures here. They fired a guy for not locking out a cage—not a robot, just a camera. He didn't even step in—just reached in to check a plug. It's a skilled trades guy. Lockout training is inconsistent. If anything's being bypassed, it's for quality checks. Lately, they've rigged it so a quality supervisor is notified. There's even a robot here that doesn't require a cage or lockout.

The family, friends, and coworkers of Ronald Adams Sr. support calls for an independent investigation led by rank-and-file workers. StarPlus workers must join with their counterparts in Dundee. Safety must be placed

under the control of workers themselves—not the pro-corporate UAW bureaucracy—by building and expanding the Stellantis Kokomo Rank-and-File Committee.



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