

“We want the truth”: Rank-and-file investigation breaking wall of silence around death of Stellantis worker Ronald Adams Sr.

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The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) has initiated an independent investigation into the April 7 death of Stellantis worker Ronald Adams Sr. at the Dundee Engine Complex in southeast Michigan. The investigation, which will be led by rank-and-file workers, is aimed at breaking through the official wall of silence surrounding the tragic and preventable death of the well-respected 63-year-old worker from Detroit.

One worker at the Dundee plant said everything has been “hush-hush” since Adams’ death, with nothing being said by company or United Auto Workers officials. In the nearby auto plants, including the Toledo Jeep Complex and factories in metro Detroit, workers are aware of the death but have been given no details by management or the United Auto Workers.

According to initial reports, Adams was doing maintenance work on a Cinetic Washer in Department 7300 at the plant when an overhead gantry engaged, pinning him to a conveyor and causing fatal crushing injuries to his upper torso. But more questions remain unanswered than answered, including whether the lockout/tag out system was compromised, whether the location of the power source of the gantry was improperly labeled, and whether cost-cutting, speed-up and similar factors during the retooling process contributed to the tragedy.

In a brief reference to Adams on Workers Memorial Day on April 28, the UAW said, “the 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 (MIOSHA).”

Family members and workers are backing an independent rank-and-file investigation because they do not want another coverup that exonerates the company and the UAW and tries to shift the blame onto the victim himself. This is particularly outrageous because Adams was a highly skilled and experienced worker who was known as a fierce advocate for workplace safety in the factory.

Addressing the fact that the UAW and Stellantis were conducting a “joint investigation” into the death of the beloved father and grandfather, a family friend told the WWS: “So,

they are doing their own investigation of themselves.” She concluded, “Well, they’re doing their investigation. We want our own investigation. We want the truth.”

There are already reports from Adams’ co-workers that the arm on the gantry that crushed him has been replaced. Workers are concerned that this original equipment, along with other critical evidence, such as IT records on lockouts, may be destroyed or tampered with.

In the five weeks since the fatal accident, the UAW, the company and MIOSHA have not released any information to the victim’s family, co-workers or the public about its causes and the circumstances behind it.

MIOSHA is legally required to investigate industrial fatalities and injuries, but it has the closest relations with the employers and the union apparatus. Thus far it has violated the guidelines of the July 2024 MIOSHA Field Operations Manual, which require the agency to provide the families of victims “timely and accurate information at all stages of the investigation.”

Earlier this week, MIOSHA rejected a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request by the *World Socialist Web Site* for a report on the initial findings of its investigation, claiming, “The public disclosure of preliminary statements and related investigative materials and information compromise the investigation by jeopardizing the accuracy and thoroughness of the investigation...”

Family members and co-workers responded with anger over the continued stonewalling by MIOSHA, with one saying, “How would the release of the information jeopardize the accuracy of the investigation when they aren’t doing a thorough investigation. They haven’t even given the family any accuracy, or any information at all.”

Even if Stellantis were cited for safety violations under the present set-up, all the company and union would have to do is submit a report with perhaps some photos and training logs to “abate,” i.e., resolve the charges. MIOSHA largely accepts their word and routinely does not even reinspect the site to confirm these claims. This “honor system” only allows the industrial slaughter to continue.

The WWS sent a series of questions to the MIOSHA

Communications Specialist Mike Krafcik, asking what the stages of its investigation are and if there is any deadline for the issuing of its report or restrictions on making it available to workers in the plants.

According to Krafcik, “When MIOSHA is notified of a workplace fatality, an investigation is typically initiated within one working day. A description of the process is explained in the MIOSHA Enforcement and Appeals Overview. The investigation basically consists of:

- An opening conference
- A walk-through of the work area
- Collection of evidence which can include photographs and videos
- Interviews with employees, employee representatives and/or management representatives
- A review of employer records, safety procedures and training materials
- A closing conference

The MIOSHA spokesman continued:

“Within 90 days of the closing conference, a letter is issued to the employer with the investigation findings. If violations are found, citations are enclosed which provide the rule violated, a description of the violation, the date by which the violation must be corrected, and a monetary penalty if applicable.”

Only after the findings are received by the employer, Krafcik said, can MIOSHA release the results of its investigation to the public—and only if someone files a FOIA request.

The WSWS asked why MIOSHA had not provided the family with updates of its investigation, but the public information official did not address the question. He said only that after the employer receives the letter with the investigation findings, “the next of kin is also notified by letter of the investigation findings. This process ensures the employer receives official notice before third parties, consistent with enforcement protocol. Because this is an on-going investigation, we cannot comment on specifics.”

In other words, this process leaves families who lose their loved ones in the dark for months if not years and, at best, results in nothing more than wrist-slap fines that are a cost of doing business for the multi-billion-dollar corporations. At the same time, by depriving workers of the critical knowledge they need, it ensures that more workers’ lives will be lost to corporate profit.

MIOSHA largely allows the corporations and the union bureaucracies to “investigate” themselves, similar to the way city governments allow police departments to carry out internal investigations of brutal killings and beatings by their own cops. The outcome is predictable: a whitewash.

The 2023 UAW-Stellantis contract gives a picture of the dozens of corporatist joint “safety” bodies, including, “The National Joint Committee on Health and Safety (NJCHS),” the Division Health and Safety Board (DHSB), Special Health and Safety Review Board (SHSRB) and the Local Joint Health

Safety Committee. These provide cushy jobs, “training sessions,” and endless vacation-like conferences for UAW International officers, including UAW President Shawn Fain (head of the UAW Health and Safety Department), and the regional and local union flunkies they appoint to these bodies.

Page 321-322 of the 2023 UAW-Stellantis contract details the membership and operations of the Special Health and Safety Review Board (SHSRB), which responds to fatalities and serious injuries. It consists of members of the divisional review board, the Plant or PDC (Parts Distribution Center) Manager/Vice President or their designated representative, Vice President and Director International Union, UAW Stellantis Department or their designated representative, the UAW International Servicing Representative, UAW International representatives, Corporate OSH, and the National Joint Health and Safety Department Co-Leads.

In the event of a fatality or serious injury, a special review board meeting will convene as soon as appropriate upon the request of the NJC. The purpose of the SHSRB is to assist in the joint investigation and incident review. An investigation including safety hazard analysis of the job or operation at issue will be conducted by a joint team including UAW International representatives, Stellantis Health and Safety Staff, trained in accident investigation. Once the investigation is complete, the joint investigative team will recommend corrective actions measures as necessary. Furthermore, the SHSRB shall meet as necessary to review elements of the health and safety program.

The purpose of such corporate management- UAW “investigations” is to conceal the truth and cover up their joint responsibility for the hazardous conditions that killed Ronald Adams Sr., Toledo Jeep worker Antonio Gaston and so many others.



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