

Dearborn, Michigan: Ford Rouge worker collapses, dies on shop floor

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Last Thursday, May 16, a veteran worker at the sprawling Ford Rouge complex in Dearborn, Michigan, collapsed and died on the shop floor after his shift at the body shop somewhere between 9:00 and 10:00 p.m. The deceased worker was identified as Darius Williams. Co-workers on the afternoon shift told the *World Socialist Web Site* that Williams was one of the highest seniority workers in the plant with 33 years at Ford.

His team leader reported that Williams had said good night before walking toward the exit with no sign of pain or discomfort. Workers nearby saw Darius crumpling to the floor unresponsive just before reaching the exit door.

An emergency response team attempted to revive Williams with a defibrillator but their efforts failed. As of this writing, there has been no report of a medical diagnosis to explain the sudden death of Darius Williams.

Over the last few years there have been scores of deaths at the Rouge complex. The company is systematically intensifying the rate of exploitation, laying off entire shifts and doubling and tripling the number of jobs an individual operator must perform. Many report that older workers are especially targeted for the grueling treatment in a deliberate effort to force them into early retirement, disability or death.

Workers at a recent factory meeting called by management reported that a co-worker defied intimidation to denounce this deliberate policy. He said:

They just double up jobs for the people who have high seniority—make them do two jobs and wait for them to drop dead. The speed-up is

pervasive and many workers do not speak out, because the union has done nothing to defend their co-workers who have.

A number of his co-workers coming in for the night shift who saw Williams on the floor refused to work and walked out in disgust. “The company did whatever it took to keep the plant running,” said a co-worker who was there. United Auto Workers union officials predictably offered no support to those who refused to work in protest.

The general erosion of health and safety conditions both on and off the job produce thousands of disabling injuries, dismemberments and traumatic deaths in the auto industry every year. This has only worsened since UAW President Shawn Fain’s bogus “stand up” strike and sellout of the 2023 contract struggle. The UAW betrayal gave a green light to the job-cutting and cost-cutting campaign by Ford, GM and Stellantis as the global automakers seek to shift the cost of the transition to electric vehicles and Trump’s tariffs onto workers’ backs.

Six weeks ago, Ronald Adams Sr., a 63-year-old skilled tradesman, was crushed to death at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Complex in Michigan, under circumstances that have still not been explained by management, the UAW or the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA).

Family members and co-workers are demanding answers and have supported the call for Adams’ death to be investigated independently which has been initiated by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). The IWA-RFC is urging workers at Dundee and throughout the auto industry to come forward with information about

conditions in the plants and prevent another cover-up by the companies, the UAW apparatus and state agencies. The aim of the rank-and-file investigation is to give workers the information they need to assert their power on the shop floor and end the sacrifice of workers' lives and limbs to corporate profit.

Workers who spoke to the WSWs are still recovering from the shock of the sudden deaths of two other co-workers at the plant. Terriel Wooten, a young father of four, just 39 years old, died on April 17 after having surgery. There was an outpouring of sympathy and support throughout the plant as his co-workers raised thousands of dollars to help his wife and children.

Workers reported conflicting stories. "Asthma, diabetes, maybe some back problem or a neck problem is what I heard, but I never got a clear diagnosis," said a co-worker. He had recently changed jobs in the plant in an effort to reduce the stress he was under.

A co-worker commented simply:

The stress in the plant is what killed Terriel. We know what killed him. It is something we all have to deal with and it's getting worse.

The company sends us to psychiatrists, and they all want to put us on antidepressants or some sort of pill, like the problem is in our head more than it is a physical injury, wear-and-tear on our bodies and the constant pressure to do more. You don't know from one day to the next if you will be the one to leave that day in an ambulance.

Exactly one year before Terriel's sudden demise, Tywaun Long, Jr. died of a massive heart attack on the Final Line at the Dearborn Truck Plant. As in most cases, workers at Ford were forced to work through the worst of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Tywaun had a serious case of the virus that he likely contracted in the plant.

Because someone is many times more likely to suffer a serious heart attack having had COVID-19, it is likely that is what precipitated his fatal episode. Moreover, despite the best efforts of his co-workers, Tywaun received no immediate medical attention, and the

required defibrillator that might have saved his life was not available at the time.

These and every such case must be investigated, studied and brought before the rank-and-file inquiry into the death of Ronald Adams Sr.

Workers who have information to provide and who want to publicize the investigation and its finding should fill out the form below.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact