

Support independent rank-and-file inquiry into the death of Stellantis worker Ronald Adams Sr.—call from National Steel Car workers in Canada

National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee
19 May 2025

To reach the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee or support an independent workers inquiry into the death of Stellantis worker Ronald Adams Sr. fill out the form at the end of this statement.

Brothers and sisters:

We all know the risks we take when we punch in at National Steel Car. This has been hammered home to a greater degree since the gruesome deaths (better described as industrial murders) of our former colleagues Fraser Cowan, Colin Grailey, and Quoc Le at NSC's Hamilton, Ontario plant.

Unfortunately, the very same fate recently befell Ronald Adams Sr., a Stellantis autoworker in Michigan, USA, in very similar circumstances.

The National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee unequivocally endorses the initiation by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) of an independent inquiry into his death, and we will do everything we can to support it.

Some may ask why we are making this statement about a worker in another country? Simply put, an injury to one is an injury to all! The basic cause of Ronald Adams Sr.'s death was the same as that of the three deaths at our plant right here in Hamilton: the prioritization of corporate profits over the safety and very lives of the workers who produce them. What's more, Adams worked for Stellantis. Stellantis has facilities in Canada, where workers here suffer under the same questionable safety practices as we do at NSC and under the same legal framework (the Ontario Health and Safety Act and the Employment Standards Act) that fails to hold employers accountable. As it relates to worker struggles, international borders have become relatively meaningless.

Ronald Adams Sr. was a 63-year-old skilled tradesman who was crushed to death at the Stellantis Dundee Engine plant during a night shift on April 7. The plant is currently undergoing retooling for production of engines and frame components for a new generation of gas-powered, hybrid, and electric vehicles.

As of yet, there are very few details on how this fatal incident happened. Both the United Auto Workers (UAW) and Stellantis are being very tight-lipped. 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 Health and Safety Administration (MIOSHA)."

Adams' family has not even received the death certificate yet from the county medical examiner. His family and coworkers have not been told officially what caused Adams' death, although some facts have leaked out.

Early in the morning of April 7, Adams was working on a Cinetic Washer (used for cleaning engine blocks), when at some point in time an overhead gantry crane engaged. It pinned Adams between the gantry and a conveyor, which resulted in fatal crushing injuries to his upper torso. The area is caged off so no one can get in there when it is operating. There is a gate, but if it is opened, the entire operation is supposed to shut down. If a tradesperson has to work in the area, the gate is opened, the power is shut off, and the tradesperson locks it out with his lock.

Somehow the lock out was bypassed, that is to say, potentially tampered with. Unlike at NSC, where we are still in the industrial dark ages, this is a highly automated system and there would be a record of it on the company's IT system. That system records how many times the machinery went down, how long it was down, the time of day, the shift, etc.

The possibility that safety equipment was tampered with certainly hits home with us. After Grailey died, it came to light that the ground controls of the manlift he was on had been disconnected. The maintenance logs for chain inspection went mysteriously missing just days after Quoc Le's death.

Adams Sr.'s family—now minus a husband, father, and grandfather—is demanding answers. The fact that they haven't heard anything for over six weeks is shameful, but not surprising. Undoubtedly, the UAW and Stellantis will attempt to come to some sort of negotiated settlement over this that will be proclaimed as "fair." We all know what "fair" means to ruling class operatives and the union bureaucrats who shine their proverbial shoes.

Three industrial murders at National Steel Car

A review of the horrific safety record at NSC is necessary here. Workers not familiar with this plant may not know its significance for the broader economy. We build railcars for the major railroad

companies whose networks stretch across North America, including Canadian National, Canadian Pacific Kansas City, and BNSF. The company's annual turnover was over \$500 million in 2021, but virtually none of that is spent on protecting our safety.

In September of 2020, Fraser Cowan was crushed when a 700 lb. lifting device fell on him after he accidentally lowered a crane and the device unhooked itself because no safety latch was on the hook. This came after NSC had been previously ordered to install them by the Ministry of Labour.

In April of 2021, Colin Grailey was crushed after having a health issue in a skyjack. He passed out with his hand on the lever while hanging over the rail. The skyjack kept going up until it hit something and Grailey was crushed to death. The job had previously been a two-man job, but Grailey was working alone. As we previously stated, it later came to light that the ground controls had been disconnected unbeknownst to anyone but management.

In June 2022, Quoc Le was crushed to death by a bulkhead for a gondola car after a chain broke.

Even after three industrial murders in the span of less than 2 years, the United Steelworkers (USW) kept telling us that we had to handle this through the legal system because that's what it was set up for. That taking matters into our own hands was not the way to deal with these issues. How wrong they were!

On July 31, 2024, National Steel Car was fined a paltry \$240,000 plus a \$60,000 victim surcharge for the workplace death of Quoc Le—the third in less than two years in their plant. As we said, this was the result of a deal cooked up by NSC lawyers, Ministry of Labour prosecutors, and the Crown. That brought the total fines to NSC to:

- Fraser Cowan—\$140,000 fine and victim surcharge fine of 25 percent (\$35,000)
- Colin Grailey—\$140,000 fine and victim surcharge fine of 25 percent (\$35,000)
- Quoc Le—\$240,000 fine and victim surcharge fine of 25 percent (\$60,000)

An all-in total of \$650,000 for killing 3 people! No one has been charged for criminal negligence or manslaughter in any of these deaths, let alone done any time. It's clear that NSC management views these expenses essentially as the cost of doing business.

The Westray Mine law (Bill C-45) is as hollow as ever! It was introduced in 2004 to make it legally possible to prosecute company management for workplace deaths in response to the Westray Mine disaster, which claimed the lives of 26 miners in 1992. But after more than 20 years on the books, not a single criminal prosecution under this paper tiger of a law has ever been successful.

Government at all levels is entirely complicit in the horrendous working conditions we confront here at National Steel Car. In the five years between June 1, 2017, and June 9, 2022, Ontario Ministry of Labour inspectors visited our plant an extraordinary 221 times for "preemptive inspections" and following worker complaints about health and safety issues, which equates to about one visit per week. In the year immediately prior to Le's death, there were 75 visits by provincial inspectors, resulting in the issuing of 78 orders to the company between June 2021 and June 2022. The frequent visits over a five-year period—which took place under Liberal and Tory governments alike—did nothing to prevent the deaths of Cowan, Grailey, and Le.

This is the legal framework the USW subordinates us to and told us would hold the employer to account. Although it's in a different country, the legal framework that the UAW, Stellantis, and MIOSHA

have in store for the Adams family and Adams' coworkers will prove no more effective at getting to the bottom of Adams' death.

If last year's decision on the death of Anthony Gaston is anything to go on, the outcome of the official investigation into Adams' death will be even more insulting and obscene than our experience here. Gaston, another Stellantis worker, was crushed to death working on the assembly line at the Toledo, Ohio Jeep assembly plant. The joint UAW-management safety committee there, in combination with OSHA in Ohio, attempted to whitewash the incident. Stellantis was fined, not for any guilt for what amounts to yet another incident of industrial homicide, but for "unsafe working conditions" a paltry sum of \$16,000! Stellantis is appealing this!

Autoworkers have been complaining about poor safety conditions that don't get dealt with for a long time, and fall on deaf ears of union-management joint safety committees.

The National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee stands in solidarity with the Adams family, the IWA-RFC, and rank-and-file UAW autoworkers in DEMANDING an independent investigation into what exactly happened in Ronald Adams Sr's death. We wholeheartedly endorse the five questions posed by the IWA-RFC, and demand answers:

- Was the safety lockout system compromised in Department 7300 on the Cinetic Washer?
- Is there more than one lockout system on this workstation and others containing gantries and robots?
- Are there documented records of previous malfunctions with this specific gantry, particularly after its relocation from the south to the north plant?
- Did manpower shortages, cost-cutting pressures and the rush to restart production contribute to this fatal incident?
- What specific safety violations and systemic failures enabled this "accident"?

No faith can be put in the corporatist UAW bureaucratic apparatus to stand up for one of its members. No one can expect anything from Stellantis. They seem to have as much concern for people's lives as National Steel Car does. Workers should put no faith in the government "safety" organizations in the US. Not only have they proven ineffective before, but now they have been gutted by Trump, the would-be Führer currently residing in the White House.

That the union and company have been silent for over a month shows the necessity for an independent inquiry to get to the bottom of what went on, show the truth, and hold to account those responsible. Adams Sr.'s surviving family, friends, and fellow workers deserve nothing less.



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