

# Musk's gutting of workplace safety and the investigation into the death of Stellantis worker Ronald Adams Sr.

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*To provide anonymous information to the rank-and-file investigation into Ronald Adams' death and help publicize the workers' inquiry and its findings, fill out the form at the end of this article.*

Ronald Adams Sr., a 63-year-old machine repairman was crushed to death on April 7 at the Stellantis Dundee Engine plant in Michigan. More than six weeks since the fatal accident, family members and co-workers still have not been provided with any detailed account of the causes of Adams' death and the circumstances that led up to it.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) has initiated an independent investigation, which will be led by rank-and-file workers, to break through the wall of silence by the company, the United Auto Workers and state agencies, expose the truth and hold those responsible to account. The inquiry will arm workers with the information they need to enforce rank-and-file control over safety and stop the sacrifice of workers' lives to corporate profit.

An estimated 135,000 workers died from occupational diseases in 2023 alone, with traumatic workplace injuries bringing the total to around 140,000. A worker dies every four minutes in the US from workplace injuries or disease.

Simultaneously with these fatalities and injuries, the wealth of the US financial oligarchy has soared. The world's richest 500 people increased their wealth by \$1.5 trillion in 2024, according to *Fortune*. These are deeply interrelated trends. The money saved by the oligarchy by slashing jobs, intensifying exploitation, skimping on safety measures, and finally, not paying out retirement benefits for dead workers, boosts the private fortunes of the oligarchs.

Trump has put Elon Musk, the world's richest man and notorious violator of basic workplace safety measures, in charge of removing whatever remains of federal occupational safety and health measures and any other regulations, which the ruling class sees as an unacceptable restriction on corporate profit making.

As head of the so-called "Department of Governmental Efficiency," Musk has already halted OSHA rule-making and laid off nearly all the employees of the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), who conduct research and make recommendations for the prevention of work-related injury, illness, disability and death. The rollback in safety regulations will personally benefit Musk, whose companies are

among the most dangerous in the world.

Four of Musk's companies have numerous OSHA violations against them including Tesla, SpaceX, The Boring Company, and SolarCity Corporation.

At SpaceX in 2023, a worker was killed at a facility in McGregor, Texas, while transporting insulation without proper equipment. Tesla did not provide straps for transporting insulation, so a worker, Lonnie LeBlanc, was used to hold down the insulation by sitting on it. A gust of wind blew him and the insulation off the truck bed, fatally slamming him head first into the pavement.

Another SpaceX worker was put into a coma for months after a part of a rocket engine flew off and fractured his skull during an automated test of the engine. Another worker nearly had their foot amputated after a roll of material fell on their foot in Washington state. Reuters documented at least 600 injuries of SpaceX workers since 2014.

Two of Musk's companies made it to the National Council of Occupational Safety and Health's (COSH) "Dirty Dozen," a list of the worst workplace safety offenders.

The Boring Company—which "constructs safe, fast-to-dig, and low-cost transportation, utility, and freight tunnels," according to its website, made the list in 2024. The COSH report said Musk "is obsessed with speed but disregards safety, emphasizing profit over the well-being of workers." OSHA issued eight violations to the Boring Company.

Numerous workers were permanently scarred from chemical burns on their arms and legs while wading through muck containing chemical accelerant used to cure concrete in the supports of a Las Vegas tunnel connecting two hotels to the Las Vegas Convention center. Such burns became almost routine according to Nevada OSHA. A tunneling machine had a significant breakdown, which nearly resulted in a worker being crushed within the machine.

In 2023, Tesla was included in the Dirty Dozen list for its fake safety training certificates and its hazardous work conditions in Texas.

In May 2020, Musk illegally restarted production at his Tesla factory in Fremont, California, defying an Alameda County public health order to keep it closed during the early months of the COVID-19 outbreak. Musk continuously sought to downplay the

danger posed by the pandemic, tweeting that “coronavirus panic is dumb,” railing against what he called “fascist” public health measures and threatening to shut down the Fremont plant entirely and relocate it to another state.

Alameda County caved within short order to Musk’s ultimatum, allowing the plant to proceed with reopening on the condition that it implement unspecified “safety recommendations.” As a result, at least 440 workers were infected with COVID-19 between May and December 2020.

In 2021, Tesla contractor Antelmo Ramirez died from hyperthermia at the construction site of the Tesla Gigafactory in Austin, Texas after working in 96-degree heat. Ramirez was never given any heat stroke protections by the construction contractor Belcan Services, or Tesla. Musk’s company did not even bother to report the worker’s death to OSHA.

In 2022, the first year of operation of the Austin Gigafactory, 1 in 21 workers were injured on the job, and this increased to 1 in 13 in 2023. The plant ranked eighth for total injuries among all US workplaces in 2023, while the Fremont, California Tesla plant ranked third, at 1,000 and 2,000 injuries, respectively. Tesla illegally withholds workplace injury data so the real total is undoubtedly higher.

In 2024, another worker, Victor Joe Gomez, was killed at the Austin facility. The 46-year-old father of seven, a licensed journeyman electrician employed by Belcan Services, died while servicing an electrical panel which was energized when it should not have been. This was a result of a lack of basic safety measures such as electrical safety equipment, Lock-Out-Tag-Out (LOTO), and the absence of “prior hazard analysis, warning signs, and communication of safe work procedures,” as OSHA put it in their report.

OSHA fined Tesla \$49,650 for Gomez’s death. As the WSWS noted at the time, Musk “makes an income of \$6,420 per second, meaning he could pay off the fine in less than 8 seconds, the time it takes to put on his shoes.”

Thousands of workers each year at Tesla plants are injured in preventable workplace accidents.

Basic information on workplace injuries are withheld from workers. Many workers *World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke to earlier this year in Austin had no idea their colleagues were exposed to hexavalent chromium, a cancer-causing chemical used for corrosion resistance and in metal finishing and chrome plating.

OSHA found that workers cleaning up the chemical at an industrial laser had been given no prior training or information, in addition to not being assessed for chromium exposure. In late 2024, OSHA cited Tesla for exposing four workers to the chemical. Tesla was fined \$13,000 but negotiated the penalty down to \$7,000.

At Tesla, the “typical” shift is between 12 and 16 hours, exacerbating the dangers workers face, and undermining their long-term health. Mandatory overtime is common at Tesla. Overwork of this sort, as well as night work, has been linked to diseases including heart disease, diabetes, stroke and cancer, as well as increased workplace injuries. Workers often work so long that they develop what has been dubbed the “Tesla stare.” Workers regularly faint from exhaustion and are left on the floor while the

production line continues. Sleeping at the plant or in the parking lots is common.

These are the conditions not only in Musk’s US plants, but internationally. A complaint filed in February by the *China Labor Bulletin* with the Chinese government, accused Tesla of routinely violating Chinese labor law, especially when it came to forced overtime. The allegations filed include charges that Tesla and its suppliers “may require workers to work extended hours, with shifts reportedly reaching up to 12 hours per day, 6 to 7 days per week. This could result in monthly overtime exceeding up to four times the legal limit of 36 hours as stipulated by the Labour Law of the People’s Republic of China,” the *China Labor Bulletin* reported.

It is clear that Trump and Musk are looking to return workers to conditions of industrial slavery that existed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which were depicted in such novels as Émile Zola’s *Germinal* (1884-85) about French coal miners, and Upton Sinclair’s 1905-06 classic *The Jungle*, about Chicago meatpackers.

These conditions have been produced by both corporate-controlled parties, including the Democrats, who are now imposing Trump’s savage austerity measures.

If anything is made clear by Musk’s record it is this: the government is no neutral arbiter. It cannot be relied upon to stop the deaths, and is in fact working to ensure ever greater profits for the financial oligarchy at the cost to workers’ safety and lives.

As a recent editorial from the WSWS stated, the investigation into Ronald Adams Sr.’s death “must be the spearhead of a broader struggle. The working class must intervene as a conscious, organized force, asserting its own interests against the corporations, the state and the union bureaucracy that defends them.” If there is to be an end to the industrial slaughterhouse, it must necessarily be led by workers in the US and around the world themselves, working together to put an end to the capitalist system which causes such deaths.

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