

Six weeks after death of Ronald Adams, Sr.

2 workers killed in separate fatal workplace accidents in Georgia

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22 May 2025

The WSWS urges workers to support the investigation into the death of Ronald Adams, including with information on other workplace fatalities. Fill out the form at the end of this article to send us your comments.

Two workers were killed this week in separate workplace accidents at two of Georgia's most high-profile manufacturing sites: the Hyundai Motor Group Metaplant America battery plant near Savannah and the Hanwha Qcells solar panel plant in Cartersville.

The tragic deaths of the workers in Georgia are part of a pattern of workplace fatalities across the country and throughout the world where industrial fatalities have become commonplace.

The death of these two comes within six weeks of the death of Ronald Adams, Sr. at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Complex in Michigan. Adams, a 63-year-old worker, was killed in an accident on April 7 when an overhead gantry engaged, pinning him to a conveyor and causing fatal crushing injuries to his upper torso.

On Tuesday, May 20, a construction worker was killed at the HL-GA Battery facility, part of the Hyundai Motor Group Metaplant America complex in Ellabell, Georgia. According to reports from the Bryan County sheriff's office, the worker was fatally injured when an unsecured load fell from a forklift during loading operations.

The incident occurred shortly before 11:00 a.m. As of this writing, the identity of the worker, who was employed by a subcontractor involved in the construction of the battery plant, has not been released. The HL-GA Battery plant, which is not yet operational, is a key part of Hyundai's \$12.6 billion investment in Georgia, and is slated to supply batteries for the

company's new electric vehicle assembly plant.

This is not the first fatality at the Hyundai Metaplant construction site. In March of this year, Sunbok You, a 67-year-old worker, was struck and dragged by a forklift, resulting in fatal injuries. In April 2023, Victor Gamboa, a 43-year-old contractor, died after falling 60 feet when his safety line failed.

According to an OSHA investigation, which cited the contractors, the workers had not been provided with adequate safety gear. These repeated workplace deaths make clear that the safety of workers is being subordinated to the drive by the Hyundai Motor Group to speed up the project and cut costs in advance of the opening of the battery facility.

On Monday, May 19, a fatality occurred at the Hanwha Qcells solar panel plant in Cartersville, Georgia. Firefighters responded to a call at 7:15 p.m. and found Marion Jose Rugama, a 33-year-old resident of Norcross, dead on top of a tank. It has not yet been established if Rugama was a direct employee of Hanwha Qcells or a contractor, but the use of contract labor is widespread at the facility.

According to local authorities, the oxygen level at the top of the tank was only 15 percent, far below the minimum required to sustain life. A nitrogen leak is suspected as the cause, though an autopsy and toxicology screening are pending.

Rugama's death highlights the deadly conditions workers are exposed to such as hazardous chemicals in confined spaces in modern manufacturing.

The Hyundai Motor Group Metaplant America (HMGMA) in Ellabell, Georgia is the largest single economic development project in Georgia's history. Backed by Hyundai and its partners, including LG

Energy Solution and SK On, the sprawling complex is expected to employ 8,500 workers by 2031 and includes both vehicle assembly and battery manufacturing operations. The facility is being constructed at breakneck speed, with the goal of making Georgia a hub for electric vehicle and battery production.

The Hanwha Qcells plant in Cartersville is part of a \$2.5 billion investment by the South Korean clean energy giant, which also operates a major facility in Dalton, Georgia. Together, the two plants form the largest solar manufacturing operation in the Western Hemisphere, with plans to expand the Cartersville facility even further in 2025.

Neither the workforce at Hyundai Metaplant nor the Hanwha Qcells Cartersville facility are unionized.

A common arrangement in large-scale industrial construction, the use of contract labor allows companies to cut costs, evade responsibility and fragment the workforce. Contract workers are often paid less, receive fewer benefits and have less job security than direct employees. They are also less likely to receive adequate safety training.

The automotive and manufacturing sectors remain among the most dangerous for workers in the United States. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 5,486 workers died on the job nationwide in 2022, with transportation, construction and manufacturing consistently ranking among the deadliest industries.

Another example of the intolerable conditions in the Georgia auto industry was exposed in February 2024 when OSHA reported an investigation of the Columbus, Georgia facility of Aludyne Columbus LLC, a prominent global manufacturer of auto parts with 30 production facilities worldwide.

OSHA's findings—which were followed by proposed penalties of \$182,344—uncovered 22 serious violations. Among the findings were failure by the company to provide protective gear and enforce safety protocols where employees were found working dangerously close to energized power lines without insulated tools and were exposed to airborne silica at levels up to 15 times higher than the permissible limit. The workers also lacked proper respiratory equipment, and the company failed to conduct fit testing for those exposed to silicosis hazards.

OSHA Atlanta-West Area Office Director Jeffery

Stawowy said in a statement, “Aludyne Columbus LLC’s failure to prioritize employee safety and health nearly cost a worker their life and allowed employees to be overexposed to silica well above the permissible exposure limit.”

As recently reported on the *World Socialist Web Site*, workers at StarPlus Energy, a joint venture between Stellantis and Samsung SDI in Kokomo, Indiana, took to social media to expose dangerous working conditions inside the facility. The workers said that there was no medical emergency response, no safety data sheets and no workers' comp doctors in the facility and that any worker who is injured must climb four flights of stairs to seek assistance.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) has launched an independent investigation, led by rank-and-file workers, into the death of Ronald Adams, the Dundee Engine worker.

The specific details of his death have been shrouded in secrecy, as Stellantis, the UAW appatus and the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) have refused to release any information about the circumstances of the accident or the official investigation into the causes of the fatality.

The campaign for an independent investigation into Adams's death has resonated with workers across the auto industry and other industries, who have seen firsthand the catastrophic conditions created by speedup, understaffing and the relentless drive for profit.

The deaths in Georgia further highlight the urgent need for such independent oversight and for workers to organize collectively to demand safe working conditions, regardless of whether they are direct employees or subcontracted laborers.



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