

2 months after Ronald Adams Sr.'s death at Michigan Stellantis plant, support grows for rank-and-file investigation

International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees
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Today marks two months since the death of Ronald Adams Sr., a 63-year-old machine repairman who was crushed while servicing equipment inside an enclosed cell at Stellantis' Dundee Engine Complex in Michigan. On April 7, a gantry used to lift engine blocks suddenly activated, pinning him to a conveyor. He died from crushing injuries and traumatic asphyxia.

Neither Ronald Adams' family nor his coworkers have received any information about the circumstances surrounding his death. Stellantis, the United Auto Workers and the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) have withheld all findings from their investigations, including any determination of safety violations.

In response, on May 13, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) launched an independent investigation to break the cover-up, uncover the causes and hold those responsible accountable for the entirely preventable death of a respected worker, husband, father and grandfather.

Key questions the rank-and-file investigation seeks to answer include:

- Why did the gantry engage, crushing Adams in as little as 1.5 seconds?
- Did management encourage the bypassing of lockout/tagout safeguards?
- Was retooling rushed to meet production deadlines?
- Did layoffs and cost-cutting endanger workers?
- What role did the joint UAW-Stellantis safety committee play?

Adams' death is part of a continuing pattern of preventable workplace tragedies in which workers' lives are sacrificed for the sake of profit. Since his death, at least a dozen more fatal workplace accidents have been reported—a number that is likely an undercount due to delays in OSHA's reporting system.

Among the dead are:

- **April 9:** Leony Salcedo-Chevalier, 34, struck and killed by a reversing box truck at Amazon's JFK8 facility in Staten Island, New York.
- **April 29:** Felix Jose Lopez Sr., Reginald "Reggie" Magee

and Felipe Mendez killed in a scaffolding collapse at a Texas liquefied natural gas (LNG) site.

- **May 1:** Alan Herrarte, 30, an excavator operator, buried in a sand and mud collapse at the Signal Peak Silica mine in Atascosa, Texas.

- **May 5:** Telesforo Torres Lopez, 54, crushed by a skid loader on his first day of work in Brentwood, California.

- **May 7:** Luis Medina fell 20 feet into a utility vault in Palm Desert, California.

- **May 19:** Joseph Maidaa, 26, died after his Caterpillar vehicle plunged 40 feet over a wall at the Salt Lake iron mine in San Bernardino, California.

- **May 24:** Raymond Feige, a New York City engineer, was killed in an explosion aboard a sewage vessel on the Hudson River.

- **May 27:** Willy Victor Carmona died of cardiac arrest following a worksite accident in Kings Mountain, North Carolina.

- **May 31:** Rigo Reyna-Sanchez was killed in a landslide during Caltrans emergency work in Humboldt County, California.

- **June 4:** Isael Martinez, 34, and Hector Pozos, 57, a day laborer, died in a crane collapse during high winds on Merritt Island, Florida.

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 5,283 workers died in job-related accidents in 2023—the equivalent of one every 99 minutes. The AFL-CIO reports that an additional 135,000 workers die each year from work-related diseases, including cancer and heart failure.

That amounts to more than 380 preventable deaths every day in the American workplace. Yet only about 1,800 federal and state OSHA inspectors are tasked with overseeing 11 million workplaces nationwide, and the agency's budget amounts to just \$3.92 per worker.

Investigations rarely hold corporate management accountable, with fines that companies simply absorb as a cost of doing business. Even these inadequate protections are now under threat, as Trump slashes OSHA funding and intensifies attacks on immigrant workers—who suffer a disproportionate share of

workplace fatalities.

This is only one way in which the corporate oligarchy subordinates safety and lives to profits. As the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, nothing will be permitted to get in the way of corporate profit-making, no matter how many workers' lives are lost. Amid the ongoing Canadian wildfires, employers have done nothing to protect workers from toxic air quality conditions affecting over 115 million people across the US.

Workers across the US and around the world are determined to put an end to the relentless sacrifice of lives for corporate profit. This was reflected in the widespread response to a TikTok video by Will Lehman—a socialist Mack Trucks worker and prominent opponent of the corrupt union bureaucracy—voicing support for the IWA-RFC's investigation.

The video received over 100,000 views, nearly 30,000 likes, and more than 1,000 comments, many from workers who had lost loved ones and were demanding justice.

The rank-and-file investigation has already uncovered critical information. Workers report that the retooling of the Dundee plant for new engine production was more than a year behind schedule. In an effort to accelerate the launch, management—acting with the approval of the UAW—routinely bypassed safety protocols.

Testimony points to the widespread use of “cheat keys” to override lockout/tagout procedures, allowing work on energized machinery. Skilled trades workers were often forced to perform their tasks without spotters, further increasing the risk of deadly accidents.

Following Adams' death, workers report that management quietly asked for the return of cheat keys, “without penalty.” They also say that the plant manager, Adams' supervisor and the UAW safety representative were dismissed in the aftermath. Spotters have since been assigned to monitor enclosed workspaces, a tacit admission of the dangerous conditions that had previously been allowed to persist.

Even as it hands out billions to its top investors, Stellantis is carrying out a massive cost-cutting campaign—dubbed “doghouse”—aimed at extracting more from workers, suppliers and contractors. “The doghouse is back!” Stellantis Chief Financial Officer Natalie Knight boasted earlier this year. “If we apply more discipline, we can ensure big savings for the company.”

Any investigation organized by Stellantis, the UAW and MIOSHA will amount to a whitewash. The IWA-RFC has learned that contractors from Fives Cinetic—the firm responsible for programming the gantry and washer Adams was servicing—have not even been interviewed. Moreover, critical operational data may have already been overwritten, raising serious concerns about the integrity of the investigation.

Despite being designated as “employee representatives,” UAW officials have worked to silence workers and resume

production without ever explaining the circumstances that led to Adams' death. Dundee workers say this only confirms what many already know: the UAW functions as a tool of corporate management.

UAW Local 723 officials claim that MIOSHA is “wrapping up” its investigation, but the agency told the *World Socialist Web Site* that it has not yet held its closing conference with Stellantis and the UAW. Once that occurs, MIOSHA has 90 days to issue a “letter of findings”—which UAW officials are under no obligation to share with the rank-and-file.

The IWA-RFC investigation is essential to preventing another cover-up and ensuring that Ronald Adams' death is not buried and forgotten like so many others.

The investigation into the death of Ronald Adams Sr. is not only about uncovering the truth—it is about empowering the working class to assert its own interests, including the fundamental right to a safe workplace.

As Will Lehman emphasized in his statement supporting the investigation, Adams' death is not an isolated tragedy. “This is not just a fight about Dundee,” Lehman said. “It's about all of us. Autoworkers everywhere, internationally, are being pushed to the brink by speedups, through layoffs and adding additional work to existing jobs, by dangerous machinery—all because of the capitalist system that treats us as expendable.”

The IWA-RFC's investigation is aimed at mobilizing the rank and file—independent of the union apparatus and corporate management—to break the cover-up, hold those responsible accountable and fight for workers' control over workplace safety. We urge all workers at Dundee, autoworkers at other plants, and all workers in the US and internationally: Come forward, share what you know, and take part in this struggle. Your identity will be protected. You will not fight alone.

Join the fight to ensure that Ronald Adams' death is not forgotten—and that no more workers are sacrificed for profit.

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