Unanswered questions as postal carrier in Grand Junction, Colorado discovered dead on the job two hours after collapsing

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Dan Workman, a 59-year-old postal carrier, died while on the job on May 30. He was a nine-year veteran of the Postal Service working in Grand Junction, Colorado.

According to postal workers, Workman was making deliveries in 95 degree heat and had just 12 deliveries left on his 16 mile route. He had been unresponsive for nearly two hours before the local postal office management sent a City Carrier Assistant (CCA) to check on him, where he was found collapsed in the front yard of a house, according to postal workers.

Local news outlet Western Slope Now reported the Deputy Coroner as saying that heat exposure was not considered the primary factor in his death, but that it "may ultimately be ruled as a contributory factor, just as any physical exertion may play a role in a cardiac event." Workman was reportedly a diabetic.

Understaffing may also have played a role. The *Daily Sentinel* reported "Short staffing has led to a delay in mail deliveries — sometimes by as much as [one and a half] weeks for some Mesa County residents."

Since his death community members from his route have expressed deep condolences for his passing. Responses to local news articles painted a picture of a beloved and valued member of the community, with many reflecting on his cheerful and friendly demeanor. Homes along his route decorated their mailboxes with black ribbons to mourn his untimely death.

Workman's death is one of more than 5,000 that take place throughout the United States each year. However, any government investigation into these deaths inevitably leads to settlements designed to shield management from accountability.

In the auto industry, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) has launched a rank-and-file investigation into the death of skilled tradesman Ronald Adams, Sr. at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Plant in April.

"There must not be another cover-up," the IWA-RFC declared in its statement announcing the investigation. "An inquiry independent of Stellantis, the United Auto Workers (UAW) apparatus and state authorities is essential to uncover the truth, expose systemic safety violations and prevent future deaths. It must gather testimony from Dundee workers, autoworkers at other plants, safety experts and others with relevant knowledge. Such a workers' investigation is crucial to laying the basis for genuine rank-and-file oversight over safety and production conditions in the factories."

Postal workers should organize a similar campaign for a full accounting of the circumstances which led to Workman's death. This includes answering why it took two hours for USPS to respond, in spite of the use of tracking technology to follow the movement of carriers during their routes.

The role played by management policies in contributing to unsafe working conditions must also be exposed. While heat exposure has not been identified as the definitive cause of Workman's death, heat related deaths have plagued delivery and postal workers for years. Last year saw a UPS driver crash after suffering from heat stroke, while two others died from heat related causes.

In spite of this, UPS still does not have air conditioning on its delivery vehicles, which workers say can reach 140 degrees (a 2023 contract committed management only to include A/C in new vehicles, but the age of the vehicles in UPS' fleet can reach as long

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as 20 years). The post office has recently introduced invasive monitoring systems to automatically write up letter carriers for “stationary events.” This played a role in the death two years ago of Dallas postal worker Eugene Gates, who died from heat-related causes.

In particular, the connection between Workman’s death and the massive attack on the USPS workforce by management must be investigated. The Delivering for America program, initiated under the Biden administration by the Trump-backed former Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, has led to widespread closures and consolidation of facilities, forcing workers in many cases to take on longer and longer routes.

However, this is only the beginning. The Trump administration has appointed David Steiner, a Fedex board member, as DeJoy’s successor, a clear signal that it intends to privatize USPS entirely. In a statement last month calling for mass action to stop the conspiracy, the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee warned that under Trump, “[a]t stake is not just the future of USPS as a public entity, but the democratic and social rights of everyone. At stake is whether this country will become a dictatorship.”

The role of the union bureaucracy in the National Association of Letter Carriers must also be investigated. Workman died only two months after the imposition of a new contract under binding arbitration, with the support of NALC, with sub inflation wages and which paves the way for USPS’ privatization.

National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 913 issued a statement mourning the loss of Workman but said nothing about the potential role of heat in his death or the failure of management to respond for nearly two hours. Instead, the union could only muster the words to describe Workman’s death as a loss of life “while completing his mail route,” completely ignoring the responsibility management holds for failing to properly respond to what should have been a clear safety issue.

Finally, injuries and deaths related to excessive heat exposure will only become more of an issue as climate change makes extreme heat waves more severe and common across the globe. 2024 was the hottest year on record, with major heat waves claiming the lives of thousands of people worldwide.

According to the Journal of the American Medical Association, there were 21,518 deaths from heat-related causes between 1999 and 2023. Annual deaths from heat exposure increased from 1069 in 1999 to 2325 in 2023. The largest increase in annual deaths occurred between 2016 and 2023, with an increase of 16.8 percent per year.

This is the result of climate change and its effects on heat waves. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), major cities in the US are seeing an average of four more heatwaves a year, which are lasting a day longer than in the 1960s.

Workers must insist on a full accounting of Workman’s tragic death and demand those responsible be held accountable.

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