

OSHA denies request for information on death of Toledo Jeep worker Antonio Gaston

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The WSWS urges workers to come forward with information and support this investigation. Fill out the form at the end to send us your comments. Your identity will be kept confidential.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has denied the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request by the *World Socialist Web Site* for inspection records on the August 2024 death of Antonio Gaston at the Stellantis Toledo Jeep Complex in Ohio. The 53-year-old worker, a father of four, was crushed to death under circumstances that have still not been explained by the company, the United Auto Workers (UAW), or OSHA.

OSHA's inspection records are critical evidence for the independent investigation launched by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees into the death of Ronald Adams Sr., a 63-year-old machine repairman at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Complex on April 7, 2025, less than eight months after Gaston's death.

The only information released by OSHA about the Toledo tragedy reads:

At 1:30 a.m. on August 21, 2024, a logistics department stock clerk was providing materials to the production line. While standing on the right side of carriage line 910R, he reached across the conveyor to retrieve a pail on the opposing 910L side. The line activated, catching his torso between the carriage assembly and the conveyor housing. He was pronounced dead at the scene from multiple blunt force injuries.

More than three months later, on November 29, 2024, OSHA cited Stellantis for a "serious" safety violation for failing to provide proper machine guarding and protect workers from pinch points on the IPF Chassis Delivery Conveyor.

"Without the benefit of effective guarding," OSHA wrote, "employees were exposed to caught-in/pinch-point hazards created by carrier conveyor components, including steel trolley wheels, travel rail tracks, and vehicle hub assemblies."

OSHA fined Stellantis \$16,131—roughly what the company earns in less than two minutes. Stellantis contested the penalty on December 14, 2024. The case is still listed as "contested."

On May 16, the WSWS filed the FOIA request to obtain the information that Gaston's co-workers and workers throughout the auto industry and beyond need to know to protect their lives.

On June 11 OSHA responded in a letter signed by Joanne M. Ries, a government information specialist from the Chicago Region of OSHA:

The inspection record you requested is in contest; therefore, the record is part of an open litigation and will not be available until this action is complete. Your request has been denied.

OSHA cited U.S.C. § 552(b)(7)(a), which permits withholding law enforcement records if disclosure could interfere with enforcement proceedings. It also cited § 552(a)(8)(A), which protects against foreseeable harm from disclosure.

No explanation was provided for how sharing the

cause of Gaston's death with workers would interfere with proceedings—unless it threatened Stellantis and its allies in the UAW bureaucracy.

In fact, withholding this information has already endangered workers. Ronald Adams, a respected worker, husband, father, and grandfather, died under similar circumstances at a Stellantis plant just 23 miles away.

The refusal to release the inspection report as long as the case is “contested” is a dire warning to Adams’ family and co-workers, who have been stonewalled by Stellantis, the UAW, and Michigan OSHA (MIOSHA) for over two months.

A worker with experience dealing with MIOSHA explained:

“These companies have powerful law firms. They drag cases out. A second appeal triggers a conference with MIOSHA’s Appeals Division, and there’s horse trading. MIOSHA has 30 days to propose a settlement. The company has another 30 days to accept or reject. If there’s no deal, it goes to an Administrative Law Judge—who has no deadline. Employers can delay hearings and try to discredit OSHA inspectors through depositions.”

Toledo Jeep workers have responded with great interest to the rank-and-file investigation into the death of Ronald Adams Sr. A former worker told the WSWS Adams’ story deeply resonated with her because of the systematic neglect and even hostility towards worker safety at the Jeep plant.

“It reminded me of one of ours, [Antonio Gaston], who was recently killed. So, when I saw Ronnie Adams, I thought it’s so local, it could be me or my friends out here. I was a forklift operator at Toledo Jeep, and I can tell you, the equipment there is regularly failing. You take your life in your hands every day. They use [forklift] rentals, and they’re not maintained, so when you get to work, you basically have to get there early to fight your coworkers for something functional. They try to turn us all against each other.”

She continued: “I’ve worked at Amazon, where we were heavily surveilled, and at UPS. No place is worse than Toledo Jeep. It’s the wild west. It ruined my body. I will never be able to work a physical job again.

“There have been accidents when the brakes failed, and because everyone is made to feel individually responsible for safety, after something like this it’s

common to flee the scene, rather than report it and get in trouble.

“Tuggers had faulty hitches and trailers that would cause us to lose the load no matter how safe you drove. The trailer latch failed while I was transporting a load of car batteries inside the plant. They crashed to the floor and spilled battery acid everywhere. It didn’t get cleaned up for days, they just put a cone next to it.”

Describing how UAW Local 12 officials colluded with management, she said, “You can go to your union rep but it’s pointless. If you don’t keep up, you will get bullied, and they will move you to someplace worse. If you complain about safety, you will be intimidated and told you’re not cut out for the job. Every area is so unsafe.

“One car went off the track and rolled downhill. It’s a miracle it didn’t roll over the workers on the other end. We warned them. But it’s a normal thing that they then try to spin onto us.

“I am not sure how to change this for the better, but letting people know about the conditions in these plants is an important first step,” she said, expressing her support the rank-and-file investigation into Ronald Adams’ death.

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