

Michigan's 2025 on-the-job death toll climbs to 13 following two recent school-related tragedies

Nancy Hanover
20 June 2025

To assist in the investigation into Stellantis autoworker Ronald Adams' death or to receive more information about the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees and their efforts, please fill out the form at the end of this article.

Thirteen workers have lost their lives this year in on-the-job accidents in Michigan, most of which were preventable. The most recent tragedies include two school-related deaths, both likely connected to budget cuts.

This ongoing industrial slaughter underscores the importance for all workers of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) investigation into the April 7 death of Stellantis skilled tradesman Ronald Adams, Sr. The 63-year-old machine repairman was crushed to death by a gantry crane at Stellantis' Dundee Engine Complex in southeast Michigan. To this day, his family and coworkers have received no detailed account of the causes and circumstances that led to this death from the company, the United Auto Workers or state authorities.

The IWA-RFC's ongoing, independent worker-led investigation aims to stop the cover-up and find the truth. This critical initiative will expose the facts, including the collusion of the union and government agencies with the profit-hungry corporate owners. Such investigations are clearly necessary in each case of major industrial injury or death given the inadequate official response.

On June 17, 2025, a 27-year-old construction worker employed by Eagle Enterprises, under the supervision of Lansing-based Clark Construction, was killed. The worker and a coworker were in an aerial lift, installing steel trusses for an addition to the Potterville High School gymnasium.

Hours before the fatal incident, there was a life-threatening "near miss" when unsecured steel trusses fell—one landing on the ground and another landing on the lift where the two workers were. Despite this, work continued without appropriate corrective action.

Tragically, the workers went up in the lift again to reinforce the trusses, but at least five trusses fell 40 feet, striking both workers and trapping them in the lift. Emergency responders extricated one of the trapped workers, but the 27-year-old succumbed to his injuries. His coworker, in his 30s, was hospitalized and is listed in stable condition.

This raises immediate questions regarding the decision-making process and the pressure imposed on these workers to meet

deadlines.

The Potterville school district, in a town of only 3,000 residents, is under significant financial strain. It is dealing with a \$903,000 budget deficit and has been compelled to consider cuts to supplies and delays in major purchases. Last year, the district exceeded its general fund by nearly \$646,000, resulting in a fund balance of less than one percent, which is significantly below the five percent mandated by Michigan law, prompting state intervention. To tackle this deficit, the district implemented a 15 percent across-the-board budget cut, affecting all areas, including staffing, instructional materials, supplies and benefits.

It would be reasonable to surmise from this nearly \$1 million budget deficit that the administrators informed the construction company that they could not afford time delays and cost overruns.

This tragedy occurred amid nationwide budget cuts to public education, exacerbating decades of underfunding. The Biden administration's refusal to extend Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds has created a fiscal crisis for schools across the country. Potterville schools had received at least \$38 million from the short-lived program.

Additionally, in 2024, Michigan's state budget slashed per-pupil school safety grants by 92 percent, cutting \$300 million from these programs and leaving only \$26.5 million statewide. While the current tragedy is not directly related, the combination of local and state-level funding cuts has left schools with fewer resources to address hazards, maintain equipment and provide adequate supervision and emergency response capabilities.

Finally, the State of Michigan is one of 12 US states that provides no funding for school district building construction, upgrades or repairs. A comprehensive study in 2025 revealed that the state needs \$23 billion for school facility upgrades to ensure the health and safety of students and staff. Without state support, districts like Potterville are forced to seek property tax millages from voters to fund their infrastructure. Potterville itself has a 14 percent poverty rate, with median household incomes below the state average and limited resources for public investment.

In summary, the economic pressures facing the district and the city have likely intensified the push to adhere to construction schedules and reduce costs, which, in turn, contributes to unsafe working conditions. These are questions that warrant thorough investigation and complete answers to prevent further deaths and

injuries.

Jackson Schools worker killed by falling cabinet

On April 30, 2025, a 46-year-old student support specialist in Jackson, Michigan, was killed by a falling metal file cabinet at work. Emergency crews responded, but the worker was pronounced dead at the scene. The autopsy cited traumatic (compression) chest asphyxia as the cause of death.

Last February, the Jackson Public School District, also facing severe budgetary issues and millions in debt, decided to cut between 10 and 35 positions. These terminations last affected teachers, support staff, secretarial staff and administrative personnel.

Did the lack of staff lead this worker to attempt to move a cabinet by themselves? This incident, the 11th work-related fatality in Michigan for 2025, highlights a persistent pattern of workplace hazards in schools and public institutions.

America's industrial slaughterhouse

Michigan's most deadly industry, based on statistics from the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA), is construction, with transportation and material moving a close second. On-the-job deaths this year in Michigan include:

- **January 3, 2025, Almont.** Two cement finishers were grinding and polishing a concrete floor in a customer's pole barn using propane-powered equipment. Both were found unconscious; the 43-year-old was pronounced dead from inhalation at the scene, the other was hospitalized in critical condition.

- **January 16, 2025, Ravenna.** While pulling a trailer with a Utility Task Vehicle (UTV), the trailer detached, causing its tongue to go under a truck and collide with a stationary metal pole, which penetrated the cab and fatally injured the worker, age 41.

- **February 10, 2025, Traverse City.** A 29-year-old roofer was removing a tarp from a residential roof when he fell approximately 20 feet, landing on his head. He was found wearing a harness and was pronounced dead at the worksite.

- **February 12, 2025, Carsonville.** A 34-year-old pipefitter was buried by a collapsing trench while performing underground wiring.

- **March 2, 2025, Sterling Heights.** A 32-year-old roofer fell, succumbing to his injuries a week later.

- **April 15, 2025, Ann Arbor.** A 64-year-old driver was killed when a rear trailer went out of control as he was unhooking it.

- **May 14, 2025, White Cloud.** A 38-year-old arborist was struck by a tree affected by oak wilt about 60 feet away from his work area and died at the scene.

- **May 20, 2025, Comstock Park.** A 71-year-old machine

operator was cutting steel banding from a bundle of metal tubing when the bundle fell, causing the worker to fall and suffer a head injury.

- **May 28, 2025, Oakland Township.** A 32-year-old laborer was pinned by a riding lawnmower which overturned. He was rescued by coworkers but died from his injuries.

In addition to these terrible and preventable tragedies, there are unreported deaths, likely due to job stress or other hazards. For instance, on February 19, 2025, in Allegan, a truck driver was discovered unresponsive in his vehicle. Additionally, on February 25, 2025, in St. Clair, a supervisor collapsed at work and passed away.

An example of the deaths unreported by MIOSHA is that of Tywaun Long on April 17, 2024 at the Ford Rouge Dearborn Truck Plant. The agency explained their lack of reporting as based on the fact that "no violations of MIOSHA Standards were cited." Nevertheless, indications are that his death was preventable. His coworkers noted that he was sick early in the shift and sought relief, but was denied. Moreover, there was no rapid response by the company after he collapse. Coworkers themselves had to administer CPR without professional help for nearly a half hour before an ambulance finally arrived.

In 2023, one worker died and 162 others working at Billerud's paper mill in Escanaba were infected with a life-threatening fungal disease. This was a full 20 percent of the workforce. Twelve percent of the infected workers were hospitalized. While this was reported by MIOSHA, the agency failed to even issue a wrist-slap fine to Billerud, the corporate entity that owned the plant.

The conditions that led to these deaths and thousands of others can only be changed through the collective, united action of the working class. For more information or to assist the investigation into the death of Ronald Adams Sr. and to help in the exposure of unsafe conditions at your workplace fill out the contact form below. All submissions will be kept confidential.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact