

With 2 postal workers dead from heat-related causes, corporate America and Trump move to gut proposed heat safety rule

Nate Rodshaw, Tom Hall
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The Trump administration is preparing to water down or kill a proposed federal rule on workplace heat exposure. The rule, introduced last year by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), would be the first of its kind in US history. Its fate now hangs in the balance as extreme summer heat grips much of the country, particularly the Midwest and East Coast.

The fate of the rule exposes the complete control of the government by the corporate oligarchy. Hearings are underway where executives have demanded the weakening of the rule, while Trump himself is also slashing federal regulatory bodies, already toothless, to the bone. Last month, he fired the same team which was responsible for the data which formed the foundation of the proposed rule, and his appointee to head OSHA is a former executive from logistics firms notorious for heat-related and other workplace injuries.

As it does every summer, extreme heat has already claimed workers' lives in the US. Jacob Taylor, 51, a letter carrier in the Dallas area, died on June 21 after collapsing from heat exhaustion on his route. Dan Workman, 59, died on May 30 while working under similar conditions in Grand Junction, Colorado. Both were subjected to extreme temperatures while working without basic protections such as air-conditioned vehicles.

Construction workers, farmworkers, factory workers and logistics workers are among the most vulnerable to heat exposure. Heat-related deaths and injuries are a class question because the ruling class' refusal to enact basic safety measures, driven by the profit motive, poses the need for workers to prepare a struggle to take control over safety themselves.

Moreover, extreme heat is getting worse as a consequence of capitalism's refusal to address man-made global warming. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the average annual temperature in the US has increased by about 1.2 degrees Celsius (2.2 degrees Fahrenheit) since the late 19th century, with projections of further warming of 2 to 4 degrees Celsius by the end of the

century depending on emissions scenarios.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), an average of 40 workers have died on the job from heat exposure each year from 2011 to 2022. An average of 3,389 workers annually from 2011 to 2020 experienced heat-related injuries or illnesses severe enough to cause them to miss one or more days of work. The USPS Office of Inspector General recorded 1,332 heat-related incidents among postal workers alone between 2022 and May 2025. That averages to more than 380 cases annually.

These numbers are widely known to be significant undercounts. Heat stress can exacerbate underlying health conditions and often goes unrecorded if symptoms arise after a shift ends. These deaths are routinely swept under the rug, with the complicity of the union bureaucracies and token fines from federal authorities that amount to little more than pocket change for major corporations.

Because of this, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee have launched independent investigations into the recent deaths of two postal workers and other workplace fatalities. These investigations are aimed at uncovering the truth and building a fight in the working class against subordinating safety to profit.

Proposed OSHA rule being castrated

The OSHA rule under consideration was first proposed under the Biden administration last year. It would be the first of its kind regulations mandating safety measures in extreme heat. This fact alone underscores the way in which corporate America has been allowed to operate largely with impunity.

Since the 1990s, OSHA has provided only guidance and no specific rules, relying instead on the broadly worded "General Duty" clause of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, which has resulted in largely reactive enforcement following

tragedies, rather than prevention.

Although OSHA launched a National Emphasis Program on heat hazards in April 2022, it was not until August 2024 that a formal federal heat rule was proposed—highlighting the glacial pace of regulatory action, as well as the indifference and even hostility of the Democratic Party to the conditions of the working class.

The proposed OSHA rule, as currently written, would mandate specific protections at heat index thresholds of 80 and 90 degrees Fahrenheit (26 to 32 degrees Celsius), including 15-minute paid breaks every two hours at the higher threshold.

But even these minimal requirements have provoked fierce opposition from corporate America. Hearings on the rule, which began June 14 and end July 2, have included testimony from industry representatives pushing for so-called for looser “performance-based” standards rather than “prescriptive” measures.

They are calling for the rule to be revised along the model of a regulation in the state of Nevada, which has few specifics for how employers should comply with it. It only mandates that large employers provide water and “means of cooling” but no mandated rest break until a worker has shown signs of heat-related illness.

The Trump administration is moving to either water down along the lines demanded or derail the rule’s implementation. Trump’s OSHA nominee, David Keeling, is a longtime executive at both UPS and Amazon. He has refused to say that he supports the rule. In Senate testimony, Keeling said only that he would “review and consider stakeholder concerns” before proceeding.

Keeling’s statements reflect the priorities of the corporate elite. He spent decades enforcing the interests of two of the most exploitative logistics giants in the country. Basic heat protections—such as air-conditioned delivery vehicles, which the company mostly lacks—have been a central demand of UPS workers for years. In 2021, Keeling became Director of Road and Transportation Safety at Amazon, a company which has become the poster child for workplace injuries.

Despite this, the Teamsters union has endorsed Keeling, claiming that his early years as a UPS package handler qualify him to oversee workplace safety. The Teamsters bureaucracy has aligned itself with Trump, along with many other major unions, on the basis of support for his “America First” protectionism. With Trump preparing to set up a dictatorship, they are concerned only about proving their own usefulness to the new regime.

The unions have also generally endorsed Trump’s Labor Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer for her backing of the PRO Act—a bill they view as a tool to secure the dues base and legal privileges of the union bureaucracy.

Dismantling of workplace protections

Keeling’s nomination cleared the Senate HELP Committee on June 26 in a party-line 12–11 vote. A full Senate vote has not yet been scheduled. If confirmed, he will preside over the dismantling of even the pretense of federal safety enforcement.

The Trump administration’s broader war on workplace protections includes Executive Order 14192, titled “Unleashing Prosperity Through Deregulation,” which mandates the elimination of 10 federal rules for every new one adopted. Under the newly formed Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), formerly headed by billionaire Elon Musk, OSHA and Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) field offices have had leases terminated and enforcement operations scaled back. MSHA has delayed stricter limits on silica dust exposure until at least April 2026.

Budget cuts have also gutted the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), while the Chemical Safety Board has been effectively defunded. These measures will lead to countless preventable deaths.

The working class cannot place any confidence in OSHA, the courts, the Democratic Party or the union apparatus. What is needed is the development of independent rank-and-file organizations capable of asserting workers’ control over workplace safety. This is the purpose of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which has launched investigations into the deaths of Ronald Adams Sr., a Stellantis worker in Michigan, and the two postal workers who died last month.

These investigations must be expanded and linked up across workplaces and industries. The fight for protection from extreme heat and other deadly conditions requires a direct confrontation with the capitalist system and the financial oligarchy it serves.



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