

Another victim of America's industrial slaughterhouse: 23-year-old construction worker killed in Michigan

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Ryan Starnes, a 23-year old construction worker from St. Clair Shores, Michigan, was killed on the job on June 30 while working on a road expansion in Brighton. Starnes was hit by a large excavator bucket as he was working in an excavated hole, according to Michigan State Police. The young worker was taken to the University of Michigan hospital, according to reports, where he later died of his injuries.

Starnes had been doing underground utility construction work for five years at the time, providing for his young family since graduating high school.

"This was hard, exhausting work and Ryan never complained, as he would do anything to take care of his family," his brother, Michael Starnes, told local reporters. Ryan's colleagues placed a hard hat and a vest at the memorial which stands outside his family's home as a tribute. According to his brother, Ryan would work "12, 13, 14, 15 hours a day sometimes."

The fatal accident occurred at approximately 3:15 in the afternoon, on a grueling hot day, as temperatures rose to the high 80s Fahrenheit. Police believe the worker operating the excavator was unaware of the presence of another worker inside the ditch.

Both Ryan's uncle and his grandfather were working on-site. His grandfather was serving as his foreman on the construction site, a \$45 million Department of Transportation project on Grand River Avenue under Interstate 96 in metropolitan Detroit.

Starnes had a fiancée and a five-year-old son who is nonverbal and autistic. His fiancée, Ky-El McRae, described him as a hardworking and loving father: "Every single night, he would come home from work and he would cuddle with our son and hold him and play with him. He worked really hard to make sure that

Luke [their son] had everything that he needed."

As they mourn this sudden and devastating loss, Starnes' family has started a GoFundMe page to help them to cover funeral expenses, as well as to help to continue to care for his child who has special needs.

Starnes' family wrote in his obituary, "Ryan was always willing to lend a helping hand to anyone who needed it. His smile would light up a room. He was still a kid at heart. He enjoyed fishing. He was a big Detroit Lions and WWE fan. He loved cooking and collecting cards."

Michael Starnes, Ryan's brother told ABC News, "I just want people to know how much of an amazing person he was, how much love he had to share with the world. And I just want people to know that he will be deeply missed."

This tragedy was the 16th workplace fatality in the state in 2025, according to the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration. It was at least the sixth in June alone. The others included:

- A 24-year-old gutter installer, whose name has not been released, who was killed on June 28 when his elevated lift hit overhead electrical lines in Ludington, Michigan.
- An unnamed 17-year-old laborer, killed on June 22 while cutting a felled tree at a residential location in Muskegon, Michigan. The owner found the victim next to the chainsaw with a laceration to their neck.
- David Reminder, a 48-year-old man, who was backing up his truck for stone delivery when the truck jack-knifed, causing it to tip over and crushing his cab, in Ann Arbor on June 19.
- A 47-year-old, still unidentified, man from Flint, Michigan, who died on June 16 when the tire of his

heavy-duty dump truck blew out, causing him to lose control of the vehicle, which struck a tree.

- Dylan Kemp, 27, who was struck by unsecured steel trusses while in an aerial lift during the construction of a high school gymnasium in Pottersville, Michigan on June 16.

Fatal accidents at work are far too common across the United States. A series of massive explosions at a fireworks warehouse in Esparto, California on July 1 led to the deaths of seven workers, whose bodies were recovered over the weekend. They include Jesus Ramos (18), Jhony Ramos (22), Junior Melendez (28), Carlos Rodriguez (41), Angel Voller (NA), Neil Li (NA) and one other unidentified victim.

The unsafe conditions which are commonplace in America's factories, warehouses and other workplaces are the product of the capitalist system and the relentless drive by the corporate and financial oligarchy to maximize profit.

All operational considerations in both heavy and light industries—including safety protocols, the hygienic state of workplaces, the handling of toxic, hazardous or explosive substances, the operation of potentially deadly machinery and the logistical arrangements for all tools and supplies needed for work—are subordinated under capitalism to the interests of profit, not the needs of the working class, which produces society's wealth.

Another contributing factor to industrial accidents is the physical and mental state of workers, who are systemically exposed to economic conditions that make adequate daily rest virtually impossible. Many workers, like Ryan Starnes, pick up extra shifts and work multiple jobs due to the low wages or the lack of sufficient health care coverage.

The daily death toll—already approximately 385 workers a day from traumatic injuries and exposure to chemicals and other workplace hazards—will only increase as Trump destroys what is left of workplace protections.

Before Trump's second term, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) employed fewer than 2,000 inspectors to cover a workforce of 161 million, meaning it would take *185 years* for OSHA to inspect every US workplace. With the passage of the new Congressional budget, OSHA is expected to conduct 10,000 fewer workplace inspections next year than they conducted during the last fiscal year on

record. This is due to a significant drop in funding of \$50 million for the agency.

At the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), 880 of 1,100 employees were fired earlier this year by the Trump administration, with more firings reportedly planned. This eliminates research into mining safety, chemical exposure, and hazardous protocol observations.

Although the fascistic Trump administration is spearheading the attack on workers' safety, as it did during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, this drive represents the interests of the entire ruling class, as American corporations seek to make up for a loss in their competitive edge in global markets by intensifying the exploitation of the working class. In this, they enjoy the support of the Democrats and the union bureaucracies, the latter functioning as the enforcers of deadly workplace conditions.

This makes all the more important the independent investigation initiated by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees into the April 7 death of Stellantis worker Ronald Adams Sr. at the Dundee Engine Complex in southern Michigan. The 63-year-old machine repairman, a well respected and skilled worker, and a father and grandfather, was crushed to death when a overhead gantry suddenly engaged and pinned him to a conveyor while he was doing maintenance work in an enclosed factory cell.

The inquiry, which is being led by rank-and-file workers independently of the United Auto Workers bureaucracy, is aimed at uncovering the truth and arming workers with the information and organization they need—rank-and-file factory committees—to enforce safety standards and protect their lives.

To provide information to the Ronald Adams investigation on conditions at your own workplace, fill out the form below. All identities will be protected.



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