

# A 19-year-old killed in California meat grinder: Workers must take control of safety!

International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees  
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A 19-year-old worker who died at the Tina's Burritos plant in Vernon, California on Sunday, July 13 is the latest victim of America's industrial slaughterhouse.

The young man, whose name has not been released, was sucked into an industrial meat grinder he was cleaning at the frozen food factory just outside Los Angeles. Co-workers heard his screams but were powerless to stop the machine and save him. By the time emergency responders arrived, the teenager was dead.

The Vernon Police Department immediately ruled the killing an "industrial accident." But all evidence points to social murder and gross negligence in the pursuit of profit.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) condemns this entirely preventable killing and calls on workers to take action. They must initiate their own investigation into this young man's death and demand immediate accountability for those responsible. Workers must organize actions from below to enforce the necessary safety measures to make sure such deaths never happen again.

As Allison Rose, the mother of a Tyson meatpacking worker who died on the job in 2022, said in an open letter: "The same corporate greed, the same disregard for human life, spans across plants, across states, and across industries. That's why we, the workers and the families affected, must stand together."

In the Vernon plant, standard lockout/tagout (LOTO) procedures—which isolate machinery from energy sources to prevent unexpected activation—were either not followed or deliberately circumvented. In any workplace with basic protections for human life, such procedures would have made this incident impossible.

There is a growing body of evidence that flouting LOTO procedures played a major role in the April 7 death of Ronald Adams, an autoworker at Stellantis' Dundee, Michigan engine plant. This was only uncovered through

the efforts of a rank-and-file investigation, in the face of stonewalling from management, state investigators and the United Auto Workers bureaucracy, which is an accomplice through its participation in labor-management "safety boards."

Adams, a 63-year-old machine repairman, was performing maintenance work inside an enclosed factory cell when an overhead gantry suddenly engaged, crushing him to death. According to workers at the factory, management, with the blessing of United Auto Workers officials, widely distributed "cheater keys" to bypass lockouts and failed to enforce the lockout standards.

Existing Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations governing lockout/tagout (LOTO) procedures, under the 1989 Control of Hazardous Energy standard, are increasingly flouted. OSHA issued 2,443 citations for LOTO violations last year, and the procedure has ranked among OSHA's 10 most frequently violated regulations for more than a decade.

This is, however, a vast undercount. Due to the shortage of inspectors and funding cuts, it would take OSHA 185 years to inspect each workplace in the US once. Trump's budget cuts will result in a 30 percent reduction in OSHA inspections this fiscal year—meaning it would take 226 years to inspect every workplace.

The White House is installing a former UPS and Amazon executive to head the agency, and changing its mission from enforcing workplace protections to eliminating any regulations that get in the way of corporate profit-making. This has met with no real opposition from the Democrats, the other Wall Street party, because they are carrying out massive cuts at the state and local level.

The erosion of safety measures is the product of a social counter-revolution going back more than four decades, aimed at reversing all of the gains workers made in a previous century of struggle. Every day in the United

States at least 385 workers die from traumatic injuries or occupational diseases—or more than 140,000 a year, according to the AFL-CIO.

Some of the more horrific recent incidents include:

- Seven workers were killed in a massive explosion in a fireworks warehouse in Esparto, California, including teenagers on their first day of work;

- Two US letter carriers have died so far this summer from apparent-heat related causes. Such deaths are an annual event due to the lack of air conditioning in mail trucks and other basic precautions;

- Two construction workers died in a Florida crane collapse;

- One worker was killed in an explosion on a sewage boat in New York City; and

- An Amazon worker was struck and killed by a truck in the loading bay at the company's JFK8 warehouse.

To this must also be added the countless thousands who have died after contracting Covid on the job during the pandemic, after being forced to work without any measures to prevent transmission.

The death in Vernon, California recalls an infamous scene from Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle*, about the Chicago meatpacking industry, first published in 1905. Sinclair wrote:

[A]s for the other men, who worked in tank-rooms full of steam, and in some of which there were open vats near the level of the floor, their peculiar trouble was that they fell into the vats; and when they were fished out, there was never enough of them left to be worth exhibiting—sometimes they would be overlooked for days, till all but the bones of them had gone out to the world as Durham's Pure Leaf Lard!

Sinclair's book, which was based on extensive research, triggered a public scandal that resulted in some of the first federal workplace safety measures. These measures have been systematically undermined and eliminated over the past half-century.

There must be no more deaths in silence! The only force that will prevent another tragedy is the organized power of the working class.

The IWA-RFC calls for the formation of rank-and-file committees in every factory, warehouse, plant and industrial facility, in the US and internationally. These

committees must be democratically controlled by workers themselves, independent of the corporatist trade unions, and committed to defending the lives and interests of the working class.

These committees will:

- Investigate and expose unsafe conditions

- Organize collective action to halt production when workers are in danger

- Enforce strict safety standards, including lockout/tagout protocols

- Defend immigrant and young workers from threats, retaliation, and exploitation

- Fight for the abolition of child labor and the protection of all workers from hazardous conditions.

Such a movement requires a rebellion against the pro-corporate trade union bureaucracy. It is doing everything in its power to jointly impose unsafe conditions with management, suppress critical information, and prevent workers from taking action. In every collective bargaining agreement it explicitly accepts the "right" of management to organize production however it wants—no matter how many die.

Workers must reject this "right," which is incompatible with their right to life.

This must be done in practice through mobilizing the power of the working class, independent of both parties and management lackeys in the unions, in a fight for workers' control. The major industries must be put under public ownership, run by workers themselves to meet human needs—not to enrich billionaires. This means replacing the dictatorship of the corporations with democratic workers' control. It means abolishing the system that sends teenagers into meat grinders and then covers up the evidence.

Only in this way can we put an end to the endless cycle of death, injury, and exploitation—and secure a future for the next generation.

*The WSWS urges all workers to submit reports of unsafe conditions at your workplaces. Use the form below. All reports will be kept anonymous.*



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**