

Stellantis worker at Sterling Stamping plant dies after reported forklift accident

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Workers at the Stellantis Sterling Stamping Plant have informed the *World Socialist Web Site* that a veteran worker, Thomas Cornman, has died after a reported forklift (hi-lo) accident at the suburban Detroit plant. Cornman reportedly suffered severe head injuries after falling from the hi-lo and was hospitalized for nearly two weeks before his death on July 21. If confirmed, this would be the third fatality at Stellantis factories in less than one year.

“We heard he fell off a hi-lo and was in the hospital for 10 days before he died,” a Sterling Stamping worker told the WSWS Thursday evening. “Some said he had a stroke, but we don’t have any facts. So far, it’s just talk in the plant.” Other workers told the WSWS they heard Cornman suffered severe head injuries in the fall.

On Wednesday, the leadership of UAW Local 1264 posted a notice on Facebook: “Our beloved Union Brother Thomas Eugene Cornman (Dept 3369 3rd shift) has passed away. He will surely be missed. Please keep the Cornman family in your prayers.” The notice said funeral services would be held at Gramer Funeral Home Diener Chapel in Shelby Township Friday morning.

Notably, the union did not mention that the death was work-related. This was not accidental. Conditions at what Stellantis calls the world’s largest stamping plant are notoriously unsafe. Two workers died there in the same week in 2021: Crane operator Terry Garr was crushed to death in a stamping press during die staging, and millwright Mark Bruce died of COVID-19.

The last thing the UAW bureaucrats want to do is alert workers to another preventable death because they function as management’s enforcers of job-cutting, exhausting hours and speedup—all of which sacrifice workers’ lives for corporate profit.

“I knew Tom because I worked with him, but I have no idea what happened,” a 20-year veteran said. “When something like this happens, the company tries to brush everything off like it’s not their fault. It’s a shame what the union allows them to get away with. The ones who fought to build the UAW would be disgusted. They don’t have our back at all.

“We work with a lot of grease and oil. I’ve been on jobs where I’m slipping while I have parts in my hand, and they just put cardboard over it. We work with steel, and even though I have sleeves and gloves, it’s just BS. They won’t let us shut the lines down even though it’s a huge safety hazard. It’s not just a little oil. It’s a ton.

“There was one girl who wouldn’t put up with this and said she wasn’t going to start the line until the oil was cleaned up. So they were actually forced to shut it down for four hours. That’s only because she refused to work.”

Earlier this week, a worker texted the WSWS: “Two weeks ago they ran out of water. Now they’re charging us this week to get bottled water out of the machine—and it’s over 100° inside the plant!”

Another veteran worker said, “Safety is all for show. They post safety stuff, but they don’t follow it. Today, a guy from corporate safety came through, so they put on a big show. The UAW does the same. But the only safety in there is if you look out for yourself.”

Another worker added, “I see them bulldozing two racks of parts or more, pushing it right up in front of you. They’re only supposed to move one at a time.”

One worker said of the 2023 UAW “stand-up strike,” “That strike was a joke. They’ll have layoffs, but then they’ll have people work 12 hours. The people who don’t work in the auto industry never believe the crap we have to put up with.”

Another worker said, “If you complain to a

committeeman, nothing really changes. A lot of stuff gets ignored, especially the working conditions on the platforms. The press-side flooring bubbles up. We're tripping while holding parts. It's dangerous. And they drag their feet fixing it."

The death of Cornman follows two other deaths at Stellantis plants within the last year. On August 21, 2024, at the Toledo Assembly Complex, Antonio Gaston, a 53-year-old father of four, was tightening undercarriage bolts when he was crushed to death by a moving vehicle on the line. OSHA fined Stellantis a mere \$16,000 for lack of machine guarding. The company is contesting the fine.

On April 7, 2025, at the Dundee Engine Complex, Ronald Adams Sr., a 63-year-old machine repairman, was crushed and killed instantly when an overhead gantry activated unexpectedly while he was doing maintenance in a closed cell. Stellantis, the UAW and the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) have refused to explain his death to his family or coworkers.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) has initiated an independent investigation into the death of Adams, to end the stonewalling, uncover the truth and hold accountable those responsible.

"What they're doing is a major cover-up for sure," a Sterling Stamping worker said. "We have to find out the truth and stop this. I appreciate what you're doing, and we need more people to fight this for sure."



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