

At least 1 worker dead, 10 injured in massive explosion at US Steel plant in Pennsylvania

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If you have information on the Clairton Coke explosion or other workplace fatalities, contact us using the form at the end of this article.

On Monday, a massive explosion ripped through a US Steel coking plant in Clairton, Pennsylvania, killing at least one worker and injuring 10 others. One worker remains unaccounted for, and residents nearby have been ordered to shelter indoors.

The victim's family identified the worker killed as 39-year-old Timothy Quinn, a father of three who lived in Fitz Henry, a town southeast of Clairton.

The Clairton Coke Works, owned by US Steel, now a subsidiary of Nippon Steel, employs nearly 1,400 workers. It produces coke, a high-carbon form of coal used in steelmaking. Located 15 miles southeast of Pittsburgh on the Monongahela River, the 392-acre facility is the largest coke producer in North America.

The explosion struck the facility just before 11:00 a.m. Monday, with video showing a blast inside the plant followed by a towering plume of thick black smoke.

A steelworker described the blast to local reporters as so loud he first thought two trains had hit each other head-on. Workers at a nearby deli said the explosion was so powerful it blew the shop's doors open.

The explosion occurred in the facility's coke batteries 13 and 14. Coke batteries are ovens that heat coal without oxygen to drive off impurities. While the specific cause of the coke battery explosion is not yet known, signs point to the possibility that pipes erupted from gas pressure accumulation.

One worker on Reddit commented, "13-15 battery was old as hell and had a poor track record of maintenance, and that was when I worked there a decade ago."

Rescue crews have launched a major search and recovery operation at the Clairton Coke Works after the blast sparked a fire and caused extensive structural damage. More than 20 EMS agencies and 14 fire departments responded alongside the plant's own fire and medical teams.

The 10 injured workers were rapidly triaged and sent to local hospitals, including UPMC Mercy, Allegheny General, Forbes, and Jefferson, which treated the victims for trauma and burns. The rescue effort has been focused on finding and freeing any

workers trapped beneath the rubble in and around the damaged coke ovens.

The operation is now centered on locating the last unaccounted-for worker. Teams are working with extreme caution as parts of the coke battery structure remain unstable, and utility hazards persist at the site.

The Allegheny County Health Department is monitoring air quality and urging residents within a mile to stay indoors, close windows and doors, and set HVAC systems to recirculate air. While officials report no dangerous toxin levels so far, community concern remains high due to the plant's long record of pollution incidents.

Despite the ongoing danger, plant operations outside the affected batteries have been allowed to continue, even as the cause of the explosion remains unknown and the investigation is expected to take days or weeks.

The Clairton Coke Works has a long record of deadly accidents. On September 3, 2009, an explosion killed 32-year-old Nicholas Revetta and injured a nearby contractor. Less than a year later, on July 14, 2010, another blast injured 20 workers, four critically. In both cases, the cause was traced to gas leaks from lines running through the coke batteries.

Pennsylvania, historically the center of the US steel industry, leads the nation in steel plant injuries, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Since 2015, there have been 266 severe injuries, with 98 resulting in amputations. On average, one steelworker receives serious injuries every two weeks in the state.

The Clairton Coke Works has been central to the US steel industry and working class struggles for over a century. Built by US Steel in 1916 as what was then the nation's largest and most advanced by-product coke plant, it transformed steelmaking by centralizing coke production, a vital component in the process.

The Great Depression formed the backdrop to major class battles at Clairton in the 1930s. Despite efforts by the Roosevelt administration to contain the eruption of class conflict through reforms, a movement of unorganized workers in the industrial centers of the Midwest broke out as part of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) movement.

The Clairton Coke Works became a flashpoint in these

struggles. On September 26, 1933, roughly half of the steelworkers at the plant joined striking coal miners to shut down production.

More than 3,000 steelworkers joined 4,000 miners to demand union representation, better wages and safer working conditions. The work stoppage was denounced by the pro-capitalist national union officials, who feared the political implications of the strike. Nevertheless, the workers in Clairton held firm, even as they clashed with company guards and state police.

Later, in the 1960s, workers and residents in Clairton began demanding protection from the cocktail of toxic gases—benzene, arsenic, lead, mercury, sulfur dioxide and more—emitted by the plant. Moreover, by mid-century, the facility's sprawling batteries and outdated equipment had created an environment where accidents, fires and leaks were constant threats.

An epidemiological study by the University of Pittsburgh funded by the National Cancer Institute found that coke oven workers in Allegheny County had lung cancer rates roughly 2.5 times higher than other steelworkers.

The increased risk was even more dramatic for workers operating atop the ovens, where exposure to raw coking fumes was greatest. For those with 15 years or more in this role, nearly one in three died of lung cancer. Other outcomes included severe eczema and respiratory disease.

Such efforts helped force the US government to establish the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in 1970, which implemented strict coke oven emission standards and other regulations.

Beginning in the 1970s, all these gains—and many more won through decades of class struggle—were systematically betrayed by the United Steelworkers (USW), as the union bureaucracy was transformed into an instrument of the corporations, working against the lives and living standards of workers.

The Trump administration is currently engaged in a massive assault on whatever remains of corporate regulations. The federal government has also taken a direct role in the management of US Steel, after it was sold to Nippon Steel earlier this year.

The explosion at Clairton Coke Works is part of an unending string of workplace fatalities and injuries across the country.

This includes the death of Ronald Adams, Sr., a 63-year old Stellantis autoworker in Southeastern Michigan who was crushed to death by a gantry crane on April 7.

In June, 39-year-old steelworker Michael Dewaine Townsend was killed at his plant in Fairfield, Alabama, after a railcar he was riding struck another railcar. Townsend's wife passed away last year due to an illness, and his death leaves his four children without parents.

In mid-July, 19-year-old Guatemalan immigrant Brayan Neftali Otoniel Canu Joj was killed at Tina's Burritos plant in Vernon, California, after being sucked into a meat grinder while cleaning.

On July 28, a 30-year-old worker in Willoughby, Ohio was killed when a truck crashed into the machinery on which he was working. The day prior, Kim Jung Won, a 34-year-old South Korean contractor, was killed at the LG Energy Solutions lithium battery plant in Holland, Michigan. After being caught between the frame and lifting mechanism of a machine he was working on he was crushed to death. At the time Won was working on the machine, it was supposed to have been disabled so he could work on it safely.

On July 30, Dylan D. Danielson and his two children were killed after a massive explosion occurred at a Horizon Biofuels plant in Fremont, Nebraska, due to dust accumulation and on-site storage of wood waste and alcohol-based materials.

All these deaths were entirely preventable had basic safety measures been followed for machinery and worksite management.

An investigation into the death of Ronald Adams, Sr. has been launched by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) which has revealed that management bypassed lockout/tagout safety procedures, something which directly led to Adams' death.

On July 27, approximately 100 workers and youth attended a public hearing into Adams' death by the IWA-RFC in Detroit.

At the meeting, a resolution was passed unanimously calling for an “end to the cover-up of the ongoing industrial slaughter.” The resolution declared that “Ronald Adams’ death was not an isolated incident but part of a broader pattern of systemic corporate negligence and cover-up that is claiming the lives of hundreds of thousands of workers each year in the United States and around the world.”

The resolution also called for expanding the Adams investigation to include the deaths of Antonio Gaston at the Toledo Jeep complex, Casen Garcia at Tyson Foods and Brayan Joj at Tina’s Burritos, along with a demand to end the industrial slaughter of workers and the bipartisan attacks on workplace safety and social programs, and a call to build rank-and-file committees.

The resolution concluded: “We, therefore, call on all workers—in the United States and internationally—to join the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees and take up the fight for a national and international movement to end the sacrifice of workers’ lives and limbs on the altar of profit. The time has come to organize, to resist and to reclaim the right to live and work in safety and dignity.”

The WSWS urges any workers with information on the Clairton Coke Works explosion or other workplace fatalities to contact us using the form below.



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