

# Worker deaths at Enaex and Bridgestone expose brutal working conditions in Brazil

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On the morning of August 12, nine workers were killed in an explosion at Enaex Brasil in Quatro Barras, in the metropolitan region of Curitiba, capital of the southern state of Paraná. The victims worked as production operators at the company, which is a leading manufacturer of explosives for mining and civil construction. The workers were mostly young, many with small children.

The explosion occurred as workers were preparing to start their shift, shortly before 6 a.m. They were in one of the plant's 25 units, a small building less than 30 square meters in size, where pentolite, a highly destructive substance, was being packaged. The workers' bodies were fragmented. The structure collapsed completely, leaving a crater at the site. The explosion destroyed other structures at the plant and was felt almost 20 kilometers away. In addition to the noise and tremors, it damaged homes and businesses in the surrounding area.

Production has been suspended since the accident. Forensic teams are still trying to determine how the explosion started.

The Army, which regulates and supervises the manufacture of explosives, reported that the company was in compliance with technical inspections up to date. The municipality of Quatro Barras also confirmed that the company has all the necessary licenses.

The Paraná Public Prosecutor's Office (MPPR) sent an administrative recommendation to Enaex Brasil and the municipality of Quatro Barras. It asked the city government to disclose a risk communication plan for the population near the plant, with escape routes and support points in case another explosion occurs, and requested an assessment of the influence of weather conditions on industrial activities. The MPPR requested that the company immediately suspend any handling of explosives until express authorization is granted by the competent authorities, under penalty of judicial interdiction.

StiqFepar, the Union of Chemical and Pharmaceutical Industry Workers of the State of Paraná, did not even express solidarity with the victims, limiting itself to repeating the company's position.

The Workers Party (PT)-controlled CUT, the country's largest trade union federation, only released a statement through its branch in Paraná. The statement called for "a serious and swift investigation to clarify the circumstances of the accident" and stated that "We cannot – and will not – normalize situations that endanger the lives and health of workers."

## Enaex's bloody history

Enaex is a transnational corporation based in Chile and part of the Sigdo Koppers conglomerate, which has been denounced for maintaining subhuman working conditions. Presented on its website as "the largest rock fragmentation company in Latin America and the third largest in the world in the production of explosive-grade

ammonium nitrate," Enaex Brasil claims to have as its purpose the "humanizing of mining," but hides a history marked by death and destruction. Some of the most serious incidents were reported by the Latin American press:

- **2000 (Brazil):** Three workers died, and four others were injured after an explosion at Britanite Indústrias Químicas (the former name of Enaex Brasil).

- **2004 (Brazil):** another explosion at the same plant killed employees José Leandro Brazau, 25, and Pedro Prestes de Oliveira, 43, who were burned to death; a third worker suffered the amputations of his hands.

- **2020 (Chile):** Four were killed in Santiago; an investigation found that the company did not have the proper license to operate.

- **2021 (Chile):** Two workers were injured in an explosion at the Calama plant.

- **2022 (Argentina):** Three workers were killed in an explosion at the Olavarría plant in Buenos Aires.

These so-called "accidents" have happened repeatedly for years and becoming a common practice for Enaex. These accidents are so destructive that investigations almost always end up inconclusive. This lets the company get off without any serious charges.

## Brazil as one of the most unsafe countries for workers

Research on working conditions in Brazil shows that the tragedy at Enaex is part of a systematic massacre of workers.

Data from the Observatório de Segurança e Saúde no Trabalho (Occupational Safety and Health Observatory) show a progressive increase in work accidents considered serious. In 2019, 102,105 serious work accidents were reported. Five years later, that number has almost quintupled, with 494,422 serious accidents recorded in 2024.

The Observatório itself highlights in its report that the records "represent only those cases of workplace accidents that were officially reported to the Ministry of Health. In other words, they reflect only those cases that the government was able to identify. This number, however, is always lower than the actual total number of cases, as many are never reported."

This is a frightening statistic, which continues to grow. In the first half of this year, 1,689 workers have already died in workplace accidents, according to the Ministry of Labor and Employment (MTE), representing an increase of 5.63 percent over the same period in 2024.

With these figures, Brazil is likely to maintain its deplorable position in the global ranking of workplace accidents, behind only China and the United States.

## The Bridgestone case and the unstoppable killing machine

In a more recent case, on August 19, 37-year-old worker Daniel Silva Saraiva was killed at Bridgestone in Santo André, a city in the traditional industrial region of ABC, in Greater São Paulo. He was performing maintenance on a machine when he was killed.

Shortly after the incident, the Rubber Workers Union (Sintrabor) held a meeting in front of the plant.

“When the union director arrived at the site, the company already had a cleaning crew there to clean up the area, and that cannot be done,” reported Sintrabor president Márcio Ferreira.

But this action by Bridgestone – a Japanese multinational corporation that is among the world's largest tire manufacturers – which should be investigated as attempted fraud for altering the scene of a possible crime, was immediately covered up by the union president himself: “I want to believe it was a mistake, not bad faith,” he said.

A local news website reported receiving audio recordings from factory employees “claiming that the machine he was using had been malfunctioning for a long time, that teams had already been notified about the problem and nothing had been done,” and that “Daniel lost his life while unwinding the cutting machine when the blade accidentally fell on his head. Employees said it was heartbreaking.” According to the website, the audio recordings also said, “that the union never shows up for anything and now it has shown up at the company.”

One of the audio recordings released says: “Everyone knows that the knife doesn’t cut. I complained to everyone. I warned them: the knife is bad. And I bet they’ll fix it now. That’s the problem. The kid lost his life to have to fix it (...).”

During a procession in honor of Daniel, a former employee recorded a video and made further allegations:

It’s hard to see a mother crying here, a wife crying, two little children crying, a family crying. And it reminds me of when I often came home bleeding, because I had had an accident at this same company, without being able to report it to CAT [Work Accident Report] because otherwise I would have been fired. (...) I resisted, because [I had] high profit sharing, a family to take care of. But today, as broken as I am, I see that it wasn't worth it. (...) The main rule remains the same: mass production and a life that is gone. A warrior who was gone, earning his daily bread. But when you really look at it, there was certainly negligence on the part of the company, which does not offer humane working conditions.

In the same video, he repeated the phrase “Human lives matter” several times. He also affirmed the need for policies to “protect real workers.”

In the video post, there are several comments from workers, former Bridgestone employees, and family members. In one of them, it is possible to read:

This happened to me and happens to many other coworkers. I have six screws in my spine from this company, and they will remain with me for the rest of my life. After I returned to the company, they gave me two years and then fired me. Now, a question that no one is asking: where will this father find

another job? We are treated like trash when we are not 100%. And so, we are replaced... May God comfort the hearts of this family and all their friends.

Daniel’s death is triggering a long-suppressed revolt, not only against Bridgestone, but also against the union, which is run by Força Sindical, Brazil’s second-largest union federation. Instead of acting as a brake on deadly exploitation at Bridgestone, the union has been a brake on workers’ organization and struggle. It was at this same factory that, in 2020, workers staged a wildcat strike challenging the union’s death policy amid a COVID-19 outbreak.

#### **A common issue for workers around the world**

The industrial murder of Daniel Silva Saraiva at Bridgestone is very similar to that of Ronald Adams, an American worker at Stellantis, which has been extensively reported by the WWS. Also, the explosion at Enaex Brasil resembles the explosion that occurred the day before in the United States, at the U.S. Steel plant, which killed two workers and injured ten others.

The similarities are not a coincidence. The generalization of so-called “workplace accidents” is inherent to the capitalist mode of production and is already factored into companies’ cost calculations. As one worker summed up in her comment on the Bridgestone case: “For them [Bridgestone], it is cheaper to pay compensation than to restructure the entire assembly line.”

In the mid-19th century, Friedrich Engels concluded in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* that capitalism kills not only through weapons, but also through misery and working conditions, in what he defined as “social murder.”

Marx’s analysis complements this analysis by showing that capital, in its relentless pursuit of profit, reduces the workforce to a mere commodity; a commodity like no other, the only one capable of creating value (surplus value), but one that is easily replaced thanks to an industrial reserve army, the unemployed.

With the modern day development of capitalism, social murder has not disappeared, but has only deepened in global production chains. And despite corporate propaganda, it is impossible to “humanize” the exploitation of labor under capitalism, a system in which the pursuit of profit takes precedence over the lives of the working class.

The only way to end barbarism in the workplace is through the formation of rank-and-file safety committees, affiliated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which carry out a program to reorganize production on a socialist basis.

As the WWS stated in response to the explosion at U.S. Steel: “The unending wave of industrial slaughter and the sacrifice of lives for profit must end. ‘Workers’ lives matter!’ must become a guiding principle for action.”



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