

Deaths in America's industrial slaughterhouse continue as OSHA faces axe

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Despite increasing signs of an economic slowdown there is no indication of a similar stagnation in America's industrial slaughterhouse. Nearly six months after the death of Ronald Adams Sr. at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Complex in southeast Michigan, there have been hundreds of more deaths in workplaces across the the US.

Comprehensive numbers are hard to come by due to the lack of government monitoring and spotty news reports, but on average, more than 100 workers are killed at work each week. This, even as the Trump administration is moving to impose drastic cuts to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) charged with overseeing workplace safety.

Here is a partial list of workplace deaths in the US since the beginning of the month:

September 3, Trussville, Alabama: Edgar Earl Davis IV, 29, died by blunt force while performing maintenance inside a cement mixer.

September 3, Lancaster, Pennsylvania: Apolinar Mendez Heredia, 63, died after becoming stuck in machinery at a tobacco processing plant.

September 4, Erie, Pennsylvania: Lyell Cook, 44, died when his forklift fell off a loading dock.

September 5, Fort Ann, New York: Peter McCabe, 62, died when his skid steer slid into a pond while landscaping.

September 8, Andrews County, Texas: James Hathcox, 48, died in a pump explosion at an oil field.

September 8, Sacramento, California: Ashkan Moghaddam 37, contractor hired by Costco, died in an underground gas tank while performing cleaning duties.

September 8, Tempe, Arizona: Trevor Lee, 29, HVAC worker, electrocuted while working on a roof.

September 9, Rockford, Michigan: A 43-year-old unnamed tree trimmer died from head injuries after being dragged down a hill by towable boom.

September 11, Wilton Manors, Florida: A 23-year-old roofer died from a five-story fall.

September 11, Egan, South Dakota: Austin John Otto, 26, died when a pipe exploded while he was trying to release pressure.

September 12, Pulaski County, Arkansas: Toby Cole, 62, died after falling from a tower.

September 12, Bessemer, Pennsylvania: Dorsey Brown Holt Jr., 70, died of blunt force injuries at a pipe and foundry company.

September 13, Georgetown, Kentucky: Richard Thurman, 35, contractor, died while conducting maintenance on an industrial crankshaft machine.

September 14, Sanford, Michigan: Eduardo Aguilar, 30, died following a fall from truck while setting up road cones for road construction.

September 15, Hudson Valley, New York: Salomon "Salo" Pop Chub died following an accident at meat processing facility that caused him to lose a substantial amount of blood.

September 16, Hillman, Michigan: A 64-year-old lumber handler died when struck in the head by a piece of lumber ejected from a machine.

September 17, Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Robert Chereone, 45, died when crushed by robotic machine at a frozen pizza factory.

September 19, Sherman Township, Michigan: A 49-year-old died when crushed by an overturned lawnmower.

September 21, Hugo, Oklahoma: Ryan Easley, animal caretaker, was killed by tiger.

The deaths continue across all regions and states, impacting workers both young and old, native born and immigrant. While injury, illness, and fatality rates have declined substantially since the establishment of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in 1971, there are still over 5,000 deaths on the job annually. Estimates put annual deaths from occupational diseases, due to chronic exposure to chemicals and other toxins, at as many as 20 times the official figure.

Trump's moves against OSHA are paired with sweeping deregulatory initiatives that will further erode already limited safeguards for millions of workers. The proposals include slashing agency funding, eliminating record-keeping requirements for COVID-19 cases, shelving long-promised new safety standards, and gutting the agency's interpretation of the General Duty Clause—its principal tool for addressing hazards not explicitly covered by existing rules.

OSHA's oversight and enforcement powers have always been extremely limited. The agency is chronically underfunded and understaffed. In recent decades funding and staffing have been pared back further under both Democratic and Republican administrations.

All too often the role of OSHA has not been to expose safety hazards, but to cover up management negligence, often in cooperation with various pro-corporate trade union bureaucracies. A case in point was the death of skilled trades Stellantis Dundee Engine worker Ronald Adams Sr., who was crushed to death April 7 while performing maintenance when a gantry hoist suddenly activated in the enclosed space where he was working. Since the time of his death, Stellantis, the United Auto Workers and the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration have stonewalled the release of any information.

Trump's attack on OSHA is not the result of mere bureaucratic incompetence, but a conscious class policy dictated by the corporate and financial elite. For decades, successive Democratic and Republican administrations have starved OSHA of resources, leaving the agency with fewer inspectors today than almost any time since its founding in 1971.

As it currently stands, even if companies are cited for serious, willful safety violations leading to death, the maximum fines OSHA can levy are paltry, amounting to a rounding error in relation to the profits of major corporations.

Even the limited oversight provided by OSHA, which was not established until 1971 following major struggles by coal miners and other sections of workers, was ferociously resisted by big business, which has always seen safety enforcement as an intolerable intrusion into its right to profit.

Now, under pressure from business lobbies demanding an end to what

they call “burdensome regulations,” the Trump administration is preparing to strip the agency of even its minimal ability to enforce workplace safety.

All new rule-making has ceased following Trump’s “Unleashing Prosperity Through Deregulation” executive order that mandates the repeal of 10 regulations before a new one is issued. Even proposed rules that were nearly completed under the bureaucratic process of implementation such as “Heat Injury and Illness Prevention,” are being scrapped.

The most far-reaching attack centers on OSHA’s proposed reinterpretation of the General Duty Clause, Section 5(a)(1) of the Occupational Safety and Health Act. The clause states, “Each employer shall furnish to each of his employees employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his employees.”

It is from the principle set forth in this clause that all OSHA standards are promulgated. Safety and health professionals, in consultation with industry and trade groups, have developed extensive standards to cover some of the most common industries and hazards. In the absence of a specific standard, this clause has been a crucial legal foundation allowing the agency to cite employers for exposing workers to recognized but unregulated hazards—whether extreme heat, ergonomic strain, unguarded robotics, or airborne pathogens such as COVID-19.

The proposed limitation on the General Duty Clause stems from the dissenting opinion of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh in 2014 when he was judge on the DC Circuit Court. Kavanaugh argued that the General Duty Clause does not authorize OSHA to regulate hazards arising from normal activities that are intrinsic to professional, athletic or entertainment occupations.

The current OSHA leadership under Labor Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer has agreed with Kavanaugh’s dissent and proposed that “the General Duty Clause does not authorize OSHA to prohibit, restrict, or penalize inherently risky activities that are intrinsic to professional, athletic, or entertainment occupations.”

It should be recalled that the appointment of Chavez-DeRemer by Trump was endorsed by a number of major unions, including the Teamsters.

The concept of “inherently risky” flies in the face of the principles of safety. There are hazards associated with nearly all human activities. It is the responsibility of an employer to assess the hazards in their workplace and protect employees from exposure in accordance with the “Hierarchy of Controls.”

While the 2014 case, *SeaWorld of Florida, LLC v Perez*, dealt with exposure to orca whales, workers should not for a second believe that this change will limit enforcement only for interactions with wild animals or sporting events. Particularly, when viewed in light of the 2024 Supreme Court ruling in *Loeper Bright v. Raimondo* which overturned the principle of *Chevron* deference.

Chevron is the doctrine, established in the Supreme Court ruling in *Chevron U.S.A., Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council*, that when a statute is ambiguous, the courts will defer to the governmental agency tasked with administering that statute so long as the agency’s interpretation is reasonable. The overturning of that principle, first established in 1984, opens the door for the scrapping of all of OSHA’s standards and rules.

There are very few explicit safety and health rules in the Occupational Safety and Health Act. The standards and rules that employers and employees must follow were all promulgated by OSHA in an effort to clarify the “ambiguous” language of the General Duty Clause. When any of these standards or rules are now challenged, the courts will no longer defer to OSHA’s reasonable interpretation.

The moves to cut funding and erode the legal basis of OSHA will be

paid for by the unnecessary death and debilitation of countless workers. Automation, robotics, and other new technologies have the potential to shorten the workday and lessen physical dangers across industries, but when implemented in the drive for profit they often bring deadly hazards.

The death of Robert Chereone at Palmero’s Pizza in Milwaukee on September 17, 2025, is emblematic of the changing industrial environment. Robotics are not only used in the production of durable goods like cars, but also in the mass production of frozen pizzas. While the details of what occurred are not yet publicly available, the situation recalls what happened to Ronald Adams Sr. and so many others.

Employers often train workers to rely on safety interlocks and other control circuitry devices for servicing and maintenance of robotics and automated systems rather than fully de-energizing and locking out equipment. Without isolating the energy sources and locking equipment out, a simple miscommunication with a coworker or the tripping of a sensor can lead to catastrophic consequences.

Workers must oppose the attacks on OSHA funding and attempts to dismantle the legal basis for workplace safety regulations.

According to OSHA’s own recommendations, one of the core elements of a safety and health management system is worker participation. However, what is needed is direct worker oversight and control over safety. This means the building of rank-and file committees in every factory and workplace, independent of the pro-company unions such as the UAW.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) has initiated this fight with its investigation into the death of Ronald Adams. A public hearing held in Detroit, Michigan in July took testimony from workers and safety professionals to shed light on the situation that has only been stonewalled by the company, the United Auto Workers and MiOSHA.

We urge all workers to join the IWA-RFC and fight for rank-and-file control of safety as a critical component of the socialist reorganization of society based on the prioritization of human needs over private profit.

To join this fight, fill out the form below.



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