

UPS worker killed in Richmond, California—co-workers ordered to resume jobs as victim's body lay in trailer

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On Sunday afternoon, September 21, 43-year-old UPS driver Shelma Reyna Guerrero was crushed to death while loading packages inside a cargo trailer at the company's facility on Atlas Road in Richmond, California.

According to police, Guerrero was working alone inside the trailer around 4:15 p.m. when an avalanche of packages fell onto her. A co-worker later discovered her injured body and called 911, but emergency responders declared her dead at the scene. On the GoFundMe page set up by her family, it is reported that she leaves five children behind.

The fund page mentions the "malfunction of a machine." Workers in the area confirmed on social media that the extendable conveyor at trailer door 89 "has been malfunctioning for some time."

On Reddit, a co-worker fondly remembered Shelma. "She was so friendly, had a beautiful smile. I would see her and she would say, 'I love your hair,' and she would smile that big gorgeous smile. I would tell her, 'I love your smile, it's so infectious! RIP SHELMA ??'"

The worker described the callous and profit-driven response of UPS to the preventable death: "They shut us down for about 2 hours between both shifts and then started the building back up. Left her in the trailer with the door open."

Even in death, Shelma was not spared indignities by the corporation. The worker said Shelma "was in a bodybag and then some idiot (my opinion) covered her with small sort bags because they thought it would be better than us seeing the body bag. She was still in the building when we left after 11pm. They wouldn't let anyone close the trailer cause the police said it was a crime scene."

The worker concluded:

"It was just business as usual. I'm so angry, upset and just freaking pissed off. The lack of respect, compassion and empathy they showed her in death just killed me. I know OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] and the police had to investigate but it still seemed callous to me to have us in there working. I just needed to share this. I'm just so upset."

Workers on the thread said they heard there was a malfunction with the "extendo" or the extended conveyor and that it "crushed her" against the wall. When loading or unloading packages, an extendo is used to reach inside the trailer to retrieve or push in packages.

In an interview with the *World Socialist Web Site*, a veteran UPS worker at the Goodyear, Arizona hub explained the dangerous conditions workers are forced to labor under:

"It's unsafe!!!" said the worker.

Just this week at their facility, the worker explained, "the highest belt jammed and packages were falling from the sky. Unbelievable." The worker went on to describe the workplace: "All around there are overhead belts in that place. I'm hearing it's the biggest or second biggest in the country. That scares me because the belts are all over our heads."

The worker added, "We had a real nasty injury there five years ago when a piece of metal fell from the top of the building on somebody's head. They don't care about you getting hurt," the worker concluded, "they only care for the money it will cost them."

Cal/OSHA, the state workplace safety agency, has opened an investigation. The current nominee to serve as assistant secretary of labor for federal OSHA is David Keeling, a former safety executive first at UPS and then Amazon. During Keeling's tenure, both companies were cited over 50 times for safety violations.

UPS issued the customary perfunctory statement following the preventable death: "We are deeply saddened by the passing of one of our team members... Our thoughts are with their family, friends and colleagues during this difficult time."

Behind these empty phrases lies the grim reality: UPS, the Teamsters bureaucracy, and the political establishment have collectively fostered a system in which workplace deaths are routine and workers' lives are treated as expendable. Guerrero's death is the predictable outcome of a safety regime subordinated to corporate profit through speed-up and understaffing.

The deadly conditions faced by UPS preloaders

Guerrero was loading a trailer—one of the most physically demanding and hazardous tasks in the UPS system. Preloaders and sorters must continuously lift and move packages of varying sizes, often weighing 70 pounds or more, in often very hot, poorly ventilated and cramped trailers. Conveyor belts hurl boxes at relentless speed. Staffing levels are kept at bare minimums, forcing workers to scramble at an exhausting pace to meet quotas.

Workers have long warned that management pushes speed at the expense of safety. Injuries are treated as inconveniences, and those who slow down to protect themselves risk discipline.

The relentless pace produces chaotic and unsafe environments.

Chronic staffing shortages compel workers to handle excessive volumes of packages, and when injuries occur, workers are often denied meaningful support or pressured to return before they have properly recovered.

The tragedy in Richmond is only the latest in a long chain of preventable UPS deaths. In May 2024, Juan Chavez, a subcontractor, fell into a garbage compactor at a Dallas facility and was killed. In February, 46-year-old Dallas Carroll was struck by a vehicle at UPS's Worldport hub in Louisville, Kentucky. On April 23, driver Julie Reed was killed in a vehicle crash and fire in Indiana. Just months earlier, California driver Expedito Cuesta De Leon was shot and killed by a co-worker while on duty.

On August 6, 37-year-old delivery driver Luis Grimaldo collapsed and died in Bell County, Texas, of what coworkers said was a heat-related illness while delivering packages in temperatures above 100°F.

The very next day, in McKinney, Texas, another UPS delivery driver lost consciousness from heat exhaustion, sending his truck across lanes of traffic before crashing into a tree. These are the life-threatening conditions faced by drivers forced to maintain punishing delivery schedules in extreme heat, even as UPS pocketed billions in profits.

According to OSHA records, UPS had the highest number of reported severe injuries of any US employer between January 2015 and May 2022, with 1,142 severe injuries—double the number recorded at Walmart. The carnage is systemic.

The Teamsters bureaucracy's crocodile tears

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters quickly issued a statement, with General President Sean O'Brien declaring:

"On behalf of 1.3 million hardworking Teamsters... the entire International Brotherhood of Teamsters sends our deepest condolences and love to the family of our dear sister in California... We must celebrate the life and labor of any fallen Teamster and remember the sacrifice and solidarity that binds us as one Teamsters family."

O'Brien is trying to conceal the Teamsters bureaucracy's own culpability. The "sacrifice" he lauds was not a voluntary offering at the altar of corporate profit as he would have it, but a death due to unsafe conditions that the union bureaucracy sanctions.

In 2023, O'Brien and the Teamsters bureaucracy sabotaged what could have been the most powerful strike in decades. Some 340,000 UPS workers were poised to walk out in July 2023, demanding improved wages, an end to two-tier classifications, and most importantly, meaningful safety reforms. Instead, O'Brien rammed through a contract hailed in the press as "historic" but which left intact the conditions that kill workers like Guerrero, Grimaldo, and countless others.

Workers had demanded air conditioning in delivery trucks, safe staffing levels, and serious enforcement of health and safety standards. They received vague promises and token improvements while the contract entrenched UPS's ability to continue extracting record profits at the expense of workers' lives.

At the beginning of 2023, UPS employed 330,000 workers covered by the Teamsters' contract. Following the sell-out pushed through by O'Brien and the bureaucracy the company has laid off or bought out

30,000 workers.

UPS recorded nearly \$100 billion in revenue last year. CEO Carol Tomé pocketed over \$24 million in total compensation in 2024. These fortunes are wrung from the labor of hundreds of thousands of workers laboring under dangerous and exhausting conditions. The deaths of Guerrero, Grimaldo, Chavez, Carroll, Reed, and countless others are viewed by corporate executives as the acceptable cost of doing business.

The Teamsters does not function as a workers' organization but as a junior partner in this corporate system. Union executives earn six-figure salaries and maintain their privileges by suppressing strikes and enforcing management's dictates. They offer platitudes and memorials while presiding over a death trap.

The way forward: Rank-and-file power

The case of Ronald Adams Sr., killed at a Stellantis plant in Dundee, Michigan, illustrates how unions collude in the cover-up of workplace deaths. The UAW, working hand in glove with management and state regulators, ensured that Adams' death did not disrupt production or profits. The Teamsters perform the same role at UPS.

To end the slaughter for corporate profit, workers must form independent rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by workers themselves rather than the union bureaucrats. Such committees must insist on full disclosure of the conditions that led to Guerrero's death and undertake their own investigations into every workplace injury and fatality. Workers must demand and ensure safe staffing levels and strict limits on package loads in trailers, along with an immediate end to speed-up and unsafe quotas.

Above all, workers must recognize that the fight for safety is inseparable from the fight against the capitalist system itself, which subordinates human life to profit. Workers must reject the crocodile tears of management and the union apparatus. The real tribute to Guerrero, Grimaldo, and the countless other workers killed on the job will be the development of a mass movement of the working class, built on the independent organization of rank-and-file workers, fighting not only for safe working conditions but for the reorganization of society on the basis of human need rather than corporate profit.



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