

74-year-old Australian postal worker killed in Perth crash

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5 November 2025

On Monday, October 27, 74-year-old StarTrack worker Theena Barton was killed in West Perth, Western Australia (WA), after her parked vehicle was struck by a ute (pickup truck). Barton had just returned to her car after making a delivery at around 6:30 a.m. She died shortly after at the scene from her injuries.

Such was the force and speed of the other vehicle that it sent both cars crashing into a nearby office building, leaving a mangled wreck. No one inside the building was injured, but staff were evacuated.

A nearby pedestrian told the *West Australian* he heard a “loud impact” as he was walking to work, and “turned around to see a car landing in the window of that building.”

He rushed to help the drivers, who were unresponsive. “I basically got [the ute driver] out of the vehicle ... I helped him out of the vehicle because we could get access to his door.”

The 38-year-old ute driver suffered minor injuries and was treated at Royal Perth hospital. Crash investigators told Barton’s family “one line of inquiry is that the ute driver may have suffered a medical episode caused by epilepsy,” according to 7 News. The investigation is ongoing and no charges have been laid as of this writing.

Barton had worked for Australia Post (of which StarTrack is a subsidiary) for two decades. She was described by colleagues and friends as a “very loved, loyal, hardworking (and) kind lady.” Her husband, who also worked for Australia Post, told local media that she was the light of his life. Family members said she was a giving person who only wanted “laughter, happiness and love.”

Theena’s daughter, Justine Russell, said in a video interview with the media, “She just made the world a better place and now the world’s going to be very dull without her.” The family has set up a GoFundMe page, to “help honour her memory and manage the unexpected expenses.”

Neither the Transport Workers Union (TWU), which covers StarTrack workers, nor the Communication Workers Union (CWU), the main union covering Australia Post, have said a word about Barton’s death. There are no reports on

any of the unions’ websites or their Facebook, Instagram or TikTok accounts.

The unions’ silence is especially conspicuous when even management has launched a media campaign highlighting the dangers faced by Australia Post workers on the road. Early last month, the company released a video containing dash camera footage of numerous vehicle collisions in which Australia Post workers had been injured.

The video revealed that, in the year ending June 2025, 280 postal workers were seriously injured on the roads. In other words, more than one postal worker every weekday is involved in a road incident that leaves them with broken bones, concussion or other serious injuries.

Australia Post’s media campaign sought to highlight “unsafe driver behaviour” of third parties as the main cause of these incidents, imploring the public to look out for posties. This is an attempt by the company to wash its hands of responsibility for workers who are injured or killed on the job.

The fact is that the ongoing profit-driven transformation of Australia Post from a mail service to a parcel delivery operation means postal workers are spending more time negotiating busy roads between delivery points, in tiny underpowered electric delivery vehicles better suited to footpaths.

The dangers for Australia Post workers are not only on the road.

In another recent incident, five workers in two Queensland Australia Post facilities were affected by toxic chemicals.

On October 17, emergency services were called to the Australia Post facility on Morris St in West End, Townsville, when a worker became unwell after discovering a package that was leaking. The facility was evacuated.

The toxic substance had already leaked onto a container which had been placed on a southwest-bound delivery truck. Shortly thereafter, emergency services were called to an Australia Post facility on Gill St in Charters Towers, where four more workers had become ill and had to be transported to hospital.

South Townsville Fire Station acting station officer Lee Burke told the *Townsville Bulletin* the toxic substance that had leaked was a 1-litre container of an insecticide used to kill termites.

Again, the CWU is silent, not offering so much as a warning to workers of the obvious danger posed by the use of Australia Post to transport hazardous chemicals. While posting such substances is prohibited, the Queensland incident demonstrates that the rules do not provide perfect protection.

As Australia Post increasingly moves away from letters and towards parcel delivery, postal workers face a growing risk of coming into contact with a harmful package.

The two incidents last month point to broader safety issues at Australia Post. In the 2024–2025 financial year, while no directly employed workers were killed on the job, the company’s annual report reveals “seven separate fatalities involving contractors and delivery partners operating in our middle- and last-mile network,” as well as “four separate fatalities involving members of the public.” None of these incidents were caused by “any fault or wrongdoing by Australia Post contractors.”

The company recorded an \$18.8 million before-tax profit in 2024–2025, after reporting a loss in the previous financial year. The return to profitability was in large part due to its Post26 restructuring program, of which a major component is the union-backed New Delivery Model (NDM) and the abolition of daily letter delivery.

The transformation of Australia Post into a parcel delivery service places the mail carrier in direct competition with gig-economy operations such as Amazon Flex and Uber. For Australia Post workers, this can only mean a race to the bottom on wages, conditions and safety, as management demands speed-ups of both sorting and delivery, to boost the company’s market share and profits.

The CWU bureaucracy was intimately involved in the design of the NDM, under which posties are being called upon to deliver more, bigger and heavier parcels, significantly increasing workload and physical stress.

The growing safety dangers confronting Australia Post workers are part of an international process. On October 18, United States Postal Service worker Steven Marks was killed on the job when his van was struck by an alleged drunk driver. A month earlier, 43-year-old UPS driver Shelma Reyna Guerrero was crushed to death while loading packages into a cargo trailer in California.

These are not just isolated accidents, but the result of the ruthless drive for speed-ups and deepening exploitation of workers by postal services—and big business in general—all over the world.

Barton’s death also fits into a broader pattern in Australia.

In 2024, 54 workers were killed on the job in the “transport, postal and warehousing” sector, among the total of 188 workplace fatalities reported by Safe Work Australia.

Less than 24 hours after Barton’s death, two workers were killed and a third injured in an explosion at the Endeavor Mine in Cobar, in far-west New South Wales. Now, with investigations barely begun, no explanation of what caused the tragedy and major questions emerging over the explosive devices used, the mine’s owner, Polymetals Resources, has begun reopening the site with the tacit endorsement of the Mining and Energy Union and the Australian Workers Union bureaucracies.

The silence of the CWU and TWU over Barton’s death and the Queensland chemical exposure is deafening and should be a stark warning to workers across the country, at Australia Post and more broadly: Organisations that are unmoved by the death of a worker on the job have no legitimate claim to represent workers. How can they possibly be trusted to defend workplace health and safety in any circumstance, let alone fight for job security, wages and conditions?

The answer is that they cannot. Workers need to take matters into their own hands. Rank-and-file committees must be established at Australia Post and StarTrack facilities across the country as the means through which postal workers can democratically fight for workplace safety, as well as for real improvements to wages and working conditions.

A group of Australia Post workers have established the Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee as a central body to fight for this perspective and assist postal and delivery workers in building rank-and-file committees in their own workplaces. We urge you to contact us today.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact