

“100% preventable”: Postal workers demand answers on death of Nick Acker

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Are you a postal or other logistics worker? Send us a report on conditions in your facility by filling out the form at the end of this article.

On Sunday, November 16, at 3:00 p.m. US Eastern Time, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and the Socialist Equality Party (US) are holding an online public meeting to organize the fight against layoffs and hunger. Register here to attend.

Nick Acker, the postal worker who died at the Allen Park Detroit Network Distribution Center (DNDC) facility on November 8, was laid to rest on Friday. Many questions remain unanswered in the days since his death, and no official cause has been released. His coworkers, however, are speaking out and demanding answers.

Nick arrived at work around 11:00 p.m. on Friday, November 7, but his body was apparently not recovered until 12:30 p.m. the following day. Firefighters told local media that he had been dead for approximately six to eight hours before he was found. While management told the press that his fiancée contacted police when he did not return home from work, she stated that she waited outside the facility for three hours before receiving help, and that she did not contact the police. Nick's coworkers confirmed this in comments to the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Josh, whose name has been changed to protect his identity, said: “When I got to work, it was blocked off. We couldn't come in, and no one really knew what was going on. You could see his family over there crying, but we didn't know who the family belonged to... That same day, they were still trying to get us to work, even to the point that they wanted us to go to another building to follow the mail. We had to fight and say, ‘We're not walking in that building.’”

Josh continued, “The way they handled her [Nick's fiancée] was messed up, too. She was outside for three hours in the cold—no one brought her in—and they even told her about the death over the intercom.”

He recounted what a coworker on first shift had told him: “She showed up because her husband hadn't come home from work, and they said he hadn't clocked out. [My coworker] saw firefighters and EMS come through the gate, and that's when someone got on the intercom and said it was a tragedy. That's when they said [his fiancée] ran in, but they wouldn't let her through the door. She had to stand at the door for hours.”

“They said she wasn't next of kin, that's why they wouldn't let her in,” he said. “But they wouldn't have even known he was

missing if it wasn't for her! She called the post office and said her husband hadn't come home, and his location was still showing at the job. That's when they went and looked.”

“They kept hearing his walkie-talkie. The maintenance guys ride bikes around the facility, and Nick's bike was by the ladder where he died. They walked up the ladder, and that's when they found him.”

Another Detroit-area postal worker told the WSWS that they only learned of Nick's death after a coworker was prevented from entering the facility and was informed by another employee that someone had died inside.

“We learned about [Nick's death] from a driver, a coworker who was there,” the worker said. “I didn't see anything online until Monday. I don't think anyone knew. The only reason we knew is from a driver who happened to be there to get packages. They told him he couldn't come in because there was a fatality.”

Josh said, “It's been real insensitive and inhumane. Honestly, it's like they just wanted to say nothing happened. Management is trying their best to just push it under the rug. It's been quiet at work. No one's talking to each other. It's not a good place right now. I've never seen anything like this.”

“The union eventually stepped in and got us an administrative leave day. We were told we were going to get two days off and return to work on Monday. And they said there would be a grief counselor available all week. Well, they slashed that to one day, and no grief counselor came. They put out a few pamphlets, and that was it. Back to work.”

Josh explained that Nick's coworkers were essentially punished if they attended the funeral. “We had to use our own personal time off to go to the funeral, and anyone who took more than two hours was written up.” He said that many coworkers wanted to attend but did not have enough personal time off saved this late in the year.

“At first everyone kept saying he had a heart attack and died, but that's not what happened,” Josh explained. “Apparently, the plant managers don't want the building to be shutting mail sorting down when they're checking for mail. When you check for mail at the end of the night, usually it's just a few parcels on the belt, and you're supposed to shut the belt down. But they don't want the belt to be shut down because they want the mail to constantly run.”

“So Nick was trying to check the mail while the belt was running. And mind you, these belts are 50 to 100 feet in the air. Apparently, he slipped and fell, his jacket got caught in the belt,

and he broke his leg. We heard he broke his arm, too, and he lost consciousness.

“The belt kept running. I heard his face had a lot of burn marks and there was a lot of internal bleeding. It really just sounds like a traumatic death.”

Josh said that postal workers are under constant pressure from management and supervisors to keep machinery running at all times, or they risk being written up and disciplined. He asked a maintenance worker whether Nick’s death was preventable, and “he said it was 100 percent preventable.”

“It is not supposed to be like this,” Josh continued. “Everyone should know where everyone is. But it just shows you the lack of effort. They really do not care, you know? I don’t understand how someone could be gone that long and no one noticed. And that’s what we’re all saying, too.

“This is not the correct protocol. If he was locked out, and the machine was off, he would have just slipped and fell, and probably just sprained a leg or something.

“Nick was always funny. He cracked jokes and laughed,” Josh said. “I’ve never seen him with an attitude. He was a good guy. He had just gotten engaged, and he was so happy about that.

“The million-dollar question is: ‘Is anyone going to do anything about this?’ It’s like they’re keeping it so hush-hush. No one is really saying anything. The only information we’re getting is from the maintenance men, and they’re taking a stance. A lot of them have been calling off all week.

“The union could be doing way more—100 percent way more—but I feel like management has a hold on them.”

Josh added, “We don’t really know if they’re going to open an investigation. They’re trying to call it a freak accident, so I think they’re not going to investigate it because they’re saying it’s just an accident.

“All the machinery is so old. It should have been updated. It could have been prevented. It just shows you that no one cares about us. And honestly, every conversation I’ve had with a coworker, everyone says, ‘That could have been us.’ Everyone feels the same.

“I think that’s why it’s hitting so hard, because no one’s doing anything about it. Not the unions, not management. It could have been any one of us. Nick could have been me.”

Another coworker of Nick’s said: “It’s sad to say, but I am not surprised that a tragedy occurred in this plant. I say to myself on a daily basis that the place is a nightmare, a disaster, and a clown show.”

A mail carrier described how mail carriers are tracked via TIAREAP (Technology Integrated Alternate Route Evaluation and Adjustment Process) to monitor carriers’ movements and contact them if they have been stationary for too long.

“[USPS] track the carriers,” she said. “As long as we have our scanners with us, they can see where we are, how long we are sitting.” She added that this is not the case for maintenance workers, and they can often “disappear” in the plant with no one knowing where they are for long stretches of time.

On Thursday, five days after his death, US Representatives Rashida Tlaib and Debbie Dingell issued a letter to Postmaster General David Steiner. “Both of us care deeply about the staff of

the NDC in Allen Park, many of whom are our constituents. We have toured the facility together on several occasions, and we have discussed and expressed our concerns regarding the facility over the years,” they wrote.

The Democratic Party’s intervention is aimed at suppressing the growing anger and opposition of workers to the conditions inside the postal system. This opposition is increasingly finding expression through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

Last summer, the USPS Workers Rank-and-File Committee launched an inquiry into working conditions aimed at “expos[ing] conditions at USPS to the workers of the world and to arm postal workers with crucial information which they need to organize a fight.” The Democrats are intervening not to challenge these conditions, but to contain the political fallout and redirect opposition back into safe, pro-corporate channels.

Postal workers also participated in the inquiry into the death of Ronald Adams, Sr., an autoworker at the nearby Dundee Engine facility in southeast Michigan. Adams was killed when an overhead gantry crane unexpectedly engaged, pinning him and fatally crushing his upper torso.

The death of Nick Acker is the product of a system that prioritizes mail throughput and profits over the lives and safety of workers. Across the country and around the world, workers are confronting the same ruthless disregard for their well-being, enforced by management, protected by the unions, and covered up by the political establishment.

Postal workers must draw the necessary conclusions. No confidence can be placed in the Democratic Party, the union bureaucracy, or the corporate-controlled media. The fight to uncover the truth about Nick’s death and to prevent future tragedies requires the building of rank-and-file committees in every workplace, democratically controlled by workers themselves and independent of the union apparatus.

We urge postal workers, and workers in all industries, who want to share information, expose unsafe conditions and take up the fight to build rank-and-file committees to contact the *World Socialist Web Site* today by using the form below.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact