

Australia: Two workers killed on Queensland building sites in 24 hours

Our reporters

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Amid a growing toll of workplace deaths and injuries nationally and internationally, two workers were killed and another seriously injured on construction sites in the Australian state of Queensland this week.

In the first fatal incident, Beau Bradford, just 15, was reported to have died instantly on Monday when he was struck by a large object that fell from the boom of a concrete pump truck. This terrible event occurred at a building site in Surfers Paradise on the Gold Coast, south of Brisbane, the state capital.

Just 24 hours later, Kimura Dixon, 45, died at the scene when a retaining wall collapsed on an apartment block site at West End in inner Brisbane on Tuesday morning. His stepson Rama, only 19, was trapped under the rubble for about 90 minutes before he was freed and taken to the Royal Brisbane and Women's hospital with serious injuries to his legs and chest.

Before ambulance paramedics and fire rescue crews arrived, the other six workers on the West End site almost certainly saved Rama's life by removing a large amount of concrete from the teenager's chest, which was restricting his breathing.

Few details have yet emerged about the exact circumstances of the two tragedies, but both raise questions about the worsening lack of basic safety conditions on construction sites.

Before any investigation had even begun, police representatives said Bradford's death at Surfers Paradise was not suspicious. According to media reports, unnamed "authorities" described it as a "freak accident." How a young worker could be in a position to be killed by a large object that fell from a concrete pump truck has not been explained.

At the West End site, the two men were working in a shallow trench about 600 millimetres deep, only about a metre from the retaining wall on the boundary with a neighbouring building.

From the scene, which is bare dirt, it appeared that work had barely begun on the project, an "affordable housing"

block of units being constructed by a developer under the state government's QuickStarts QLD program.

Because of the danger that a neighbouring apartment building could collapse, its residents were told to evacuate. One of the residents, Rhett, told Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) Radio Brisbane: "The police came knocking on all our doors and told us all to leave, get out of here."

Family members and friends of the victims expressed shock and grief. An online fundraiser to help his family with funeral and other costs remembered the Gold Coast teenager as kind and caring, with a quick sense of humour that could brighten any room.

"Beau wasn't built for classroom walls—he was built for real work," the fundraiser organiser Alicia Downs wrote. "He loved being on-site, learning new things, and pushing himself..."

"There is no preparation for a loss like this. Our entire family is heartbroken beyond words as we try to navigate the unimaginable."

After the West End disaster, Dixon's daughter Rheign Reedy-Dixon told the media her father's death was "so sudden and tragic."

"All we can think about was how excited he would've been to be able to be at work to provide for the household," she said. "Our dad was the most caring and amazing father ever, his love for us kids was beyond words."

A construction worker who came to the West End scene told the *World Socialist Web Site*: "It's all about profits, you know, building these sites faster and faster and workers die as a result."

Both incidents are being investigated by the state's official work safety agency, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, and Queensland Police will prepare reports for the state coroner. Such inquiries usually take years and then cover up the underlying causes and responsibilities for workers' deaths.

But Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) officials said they were assisting these

authorities with the investigations. They issued only perfunctory statements and appealed to employers to uphold safety standards.

“We have been deeply saddened by these incidents and extend our deepest condolences to the family, friends and coworkers,” CFMEU official Jared Abbott said. “Nothing is more important than worker safety. Companies must uphold the highest safety standards on job sites across the state.”

Yet these deaths are not aberrations. There has been a series of fatalities in Brisbane over the past 18 months.

In January, a construction worker died at a Douglas Construction site in the western suburb of Wacol, apparently from heat stress under unbearable conditions. The previous November, 48-year-old building worker Brendon Stevens died on a Brisbane site after being struck on the head by a falling piece of metal pipe. Stevens was working during heavy rainfall, a risk that should have been prevented.

Stevens’ death triggered a demonstration by thousands of building workers outside the state parliament. They marched and protested against the state Liberal National Party government after it announced it would suspend Best Practice Industry Conditions (BPIC) for major construction projects.

The BPIC included a heat policy that said workers should not be forced to work in an area where the temperature was above 35° Celsius. The abolition of that and other basic safety requirements has inevitably exposed construction workers to more unsafe and potentially deadly conditions.

Ten months earlier, in January 2024, construction workers walked off a state government Cross River Rail job site in Brisbane after a worker died from heat stress.

That death occurred under the previous state Labor government, pointing to the bipartisan Labor-LNP culpability for the fatalities, along with the developers and employers whose interests the political establishment serves.

Data from Safe Work Australia indicates that about 400 workers died on the job in 2023 and 2024 in all industries. Of all the reported workplace fatalities, the construction industry was the third-most deadly. During that two-year period, it produced 82 deaths, or more than 20 percent of the total, only behind “agriculture, forestry and fishing” and “transport, postal and warehouse.”

These figures understate the true toll because chronic occupational illnesses and unreported incidents are often excluded from official counts.

The BPIC, negotiated between the previous Queensland Labor government and various trade unions, was largely an attempt to keep a lid on anger and opposition among workers. But now even minimal protections are being thrown overboard in order to cut costs, speed up

construction and maximise profits.

This was taken to a new level in August 2024, when the federal Labor government anti-democratically placed the CFMEU construction division nationally under the control of a government-installed administrator. Though carried out under the pretext of combatting corruption allegations against union officials, the real targets of this dictatorial takeover are rank-and-file building workers, an historically militant section of the working class.

However, the CFMEU and all the unions work hand-in-hand with management and the nominal government safety bodies to cover over the real cause of dangerous working conditions, the subordination of workers’ health and lives to the interests of corporate profit through speed-ups, subcontracting and casualisation.

The recent deaths of a young worker at the Port Kembla steelworks and of two mineworkers in the Cobar tragedy are typical: work continued or quickly resumed after the deaths, management imposed gag orders on workers and investigations were left in the hands of official agencies, ensuring no meaningful accountability. At best, companies escape with token fines, amounting to a tiny fraction of their profits.

Workplace deaths and serious injuries are on the rise globally, as corporations cut costs and impose productivity increases to satisfy the demands of their financial backers.

To fight this, workers need to take matters into their own hands. Rank-and-file committees, independent of the union bureaucracies, must be established in workplaces everywhere to fight for improved safety, wages and conditions.

Under the democratic control of workers, not union bureaucrats, these committees could assess site conditions, investigate deaths and injuries, formulate demands and enforce safety measures, including through strike action.

Above all, what is posed is the need to fight for a workers’ government to implement socialist policies, including placing the construction industry, along with the banks and major corporations, under public ownership and democratic workers’ control.



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