

Workers must demand answers

Autopsy reveals Atlanta USPS worker Russell Scruggs, Jr. suffered “cardiac event” at work; Detroit worker Nick Acker died of mechanical asphyxiation

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The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) has called for an independent investigation, led by rank-and-file workers, into the recent deaths of US Postal Service workers Nick Acker, 36, in the Detroit area and Russell Scruggs, Jr., 44, near Atlanta. We urge postal workers to come forward with information about safety conditions at their facilities by filling out the form at the end of this article. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

As part of its independent investigation into workplace deaths at USPS facilities, the Postal Workers Rank and File Committee has obtained the autopsy report for Russell Scruggs, Jr., a 44-year-old postal worker who died on the job at the Palmetto, Georgia USPS facility on November 15, 2025. The inquiry, conducted independent of management and pro-corporate union bureaucrats, was launched in response to a series of recent fatalities including Scruggs as well as Nick Acker in Michigan. It seeks to establish the facts surrounding these deaths and hold management accountable for unsafe working conditions.

Celebration of life and memorial services were held for Scruggs in late December, and little information has been released on the conditions of his death beyond what has been reported by his coworkers who have begun to come forward to the committee’s investigation.

Dr. Stephanie Zhang of the Fulton County Medical Examiner’s Office writes: “It is my opinion that Russell Scruggs, Jr. died as a result of heart failure due to hypertensive cardiovascular disease. Autopsy examination reveals that, although there was a laceration to the back of the head, there was no injury to the skull or brain. Internal examination reveals a massively enlarged heart with a thickened left and right ventricular walls and a dilated left ventricle. These findings are evidence of his heart failure and hypertension. Along with the reported circumstances, it is likely that Mr. Scruggs sustained a cardiac event after which he was witnessed going unresponsive and... falling and hitting his head. The laceration of the head did not contribute to death. The manner of death is classified as natural.”

While the manner of death can medically be classified as “natural,” the circumstances leading up to Russell’s death were entirely preventable, according to multiple accounts from his coworkers who were with him that day.

The autopsy report corroborates the accounts of Russell’s death by his coworkers who told the WSWs that he fell and hit his head, possibly as the result of a medical emergency, and that treatment was not administered quickly enough. One worker reported that it appeared that Russell had already died before he was taken to the hospital where resuscitation attempts were made.

Acker autopsy reveals violent death from mechanical asphyxiation

Just one week before Scruggs’ death, maintenance mechanic Nick Acker, 36, was killed at the Detroit Network Distribution Center in Allen Park, Michigan on November 8. His body was found stuck in a mail sorting machine, where authorities estimated he had been dead for six to eight hours before being discovered by firefighters.

The Wayne County Medical Examiner’s autopsy report, originally reported by the *Detroit News*, determined that Acker died of mechanical asphyxiation. The report documented extensive trauma to his body, including lacerations across multiple areas and soft tissue contusions, including to his liver. The findings paint a picture of a painful, violent death that took hours to discover.

The circumstances of Acker’s death raise fundamental questions about basic workplace safety protocols. Why was Acker working on this machine by himself? Why were proper lockout/tagout procedures not followed to disconnect the equipment from its power supply before maintenance work began? Postal workers have reported that management routinely pressures workers to bypass these critical safety measures to minimize downtime and

maintain production levels—the same deadly corner-cutting that contributed to the death of autoworker Ronald Adams, Sr. at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Complex in Michigan.

“They threaten you”

Multiple USPS employees at the Palmetto facility confirmed that there is no defibrillator equipment on site, much less any professionally trained medical staff to intervene in the event of an emergency. Workers cannot even access their cell phones due to the signal being cut off inside of the plant to preserve bandwidth for networked machinery in the facility.

Earlier in the day, Russell felt unwell and requested to be sent home, according to a coworker. “We know that Russell asked a supervisor two times to go home and was told no. He didn’t feel good. He was going back and forth getting water and others in his department said he was denied his request to leave early.

“It’s a standard practice for these supervisors: if you’re sick and ask to go home, they’ll say you can’t, because they need you to keep things functioning. We’re supposed to be allowed to leave with a 3971 form but they tell MHAs [mail handler assistants] and non-career employees that if you leave, you could get fired. They threaten you with that.”

Russell’s coworkers reported that other employees found him unresponsive and clearly injured on the floor, lying in a puddle of blood from an apparent head wound likely sustained from losing consciousness while experiencing a “cardiac event,” as indicated in the autopsy. However, due to the fact that cell phone service is blocked off at the plant, they were unable to call for immediate medical assistance. They had to run to the dock outside to tell a supervisor that there was an emergency, and the supervisor responded that their protocol was to contact the third-party security guards who are responsible for calling 911.

Once the ambulance arrived at the Palmetto facility, they could not access the correct entrance near where Russell was located. One coworker said this was possibly because the doors were locked. Others told the WSWs that the overall lack of emergency procedures contributed to confusion and significant delays. Apparently a security guard attempted to perform CPR prior to the EMT’s arrival after being contacted by the supervisor and calling 911, but the security guards are not trained medical professionals.

According to some of Russell’s coworkers, the amount of time that lapsed between when Russell was found injured and when the ambulance arrived was over an hour.

“We do not have any place where workers can go if they aren’t feeling good. We don’t have medical staff, we don’t have a nurse office or anything like that. I am positively certain, to this day, even now after this incident with Russell, that we do not have a defibrillator device on site at this facility,” Jane told the WSWs. “Our first aid kit is barely stocked.”

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On December 3, 2025, the Postal Workers Rank and File Committee issued a statement calling on all postal workers to come forward with information on the deaths of Russell Scruggs Jr., Nick Acker, and any other deaths and unsafe working conditions. The committee explained that its independent inquiry “will collect testimonies, inspect machine lockout/tagout records, document the bypassing of safety features, obtain grievance histories and witness statements, and preserve photographic and video evidence.”

Many questions remain unanswered:

- Is there an incident report from Russell’s death? Who has been contacted to provide testimony? Who is in charge of collecting testimony and accounts of that day?

- Why are workers’ cell phones still blocked from service, in spite of overwhelming evidence that this has caused great distress and even death on multiple occasions?

- What are the protocols for medical emergencies and even basic injuries? Why was security administering CPR to Russell instead of a licensed, trained medical professional?

- Were the doors to the entrance locked when EMS arrived? What prevented them from accessing the location of Russell’s body inside the facility?

- Why is there no defibrillator equipment in the plant, in spite of multiple deaths in the facility?

- How much time elapsed from when Russell’s body was found and when emergency medical services were contacted by management/supervisors?

- Were proper lockout/tagout procedures followed when Nick Acker was working on the mail sorting machine? Why was he working alone on dangerous equipment?

- How long did it take for anyone to notice that Acker was missing, given that his body was not found for six to eight hours?

The only way to answer these questions is if workers with relevant information come forward. Fill out the form below to get in touch with the committee. We will protect your identity.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact