

“They watched him get crushed”: Ford Chicago Assembly Plant worker critically injured after management ignored safety warnings

George Marlowe
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The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees has launched an investigation into deadly conditions in US auto plants. Fill out the form below to contribute information to this investigation. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Workers at the Ford Chicago Assembly Plant are responding with shock after a worker was crushed beneath a vehicle after it fell from an overhead clamshell carrier in the chassis area.

The worker was critically injured and airlifted from the plant. Multiple workers report that management had been warned in advance that the equipment was unsafe but ordered production to continue anyway.

One worker who spoke to the WSWWS said, “They were in critical condition in the hospital. Management was notified before this happened. The chain or whatever wasn’t secure. Multiple people told multiple managers this was not secure. But they didn’t listen.

“He was standing up securing the bolts on the car like he was used to,” the worker said. “There’s usually six people under the car. But it was just him, thankfully. Normally there’s six people under a car in that area.”

The same worker said the injured man was removed from the line on a stretcher, his neck immobilized. “They watched him get crushed,” the worker added. “He was taken out in a stretcher with his neck secured. Everyone was posting on Facebook they couldn’t believe they had to continue working.”

Workers say management did not stop the line or send employees home after the near-fatal injury. “Not only did they do nothing,” the worker said, “but they did not stop the line. They did not send everyone home. They made people work through that, just like the guy with the seizure. That was traumatic to see for everyone.

“Everybody wanted the line stopped and sent home,” the

worker told us. “They couldn’t even work in these conditions.”

Another worker who spoke to the WSWWS said, “From what I’ve heard it’s an issue that’s been complained about before. ... They’re saying [there] should be some kind of protection in place because it’s happened before. Just nobody was under it before, luckily.”

The same worker added, “People were calling OSHA from the plant. I don’t know for sure, but I heard no plant manager or assistant plant managers or top union reps came on site for the situation. We are all in shock still, and the morale is definitely down right now. People are going to medical and calling off on that side of the plant.”

A day after the incident, he added, “We still haven’t heard anything from the union yet.”

Another worker confirmed that management ordered production to continue. “I did hear they kept the line running,” the worker said, “but a lot of people went home because they weren’t mentally right after that, and I heard a couple people contacted OSHA.”

Workers also expressed anger over the response of the union and management on social media.

One worker wrote, “For the union or its representatives to tell any union brother or sister to look at something from the company’s point of view, when someone got hurt, is wild. Things like that hurt solidarity and cause the members to lose faith in the process and representation.

“This incident was preventable. Once again when the membership speaks to anyone in salary about fixing something, it should be treated with a high level of severity. Apparently there have been complaints in the area for a while but no real attention to the issue. This is how these things happen sacrificing actual safety for compliance with the illusion of safety.”

The same worker continued, “Racks fall, hoists break,

systems fail. When members interact with these processes daily, say something is wrong, why is it dismissed or shelved constantly? Yet, parts and other things that aid in production can be flown in, waited on and or expedited to get production going. Why is it that the same energy isn't put around protecting the very hands that build the product?"

Another worker also wrote on social media, "The only time the union safety is on the floor present is when he's carting company safety around. Anytime she comes to look at something for real, guess who's never around."

Another worker wrote, "It's also sad as hell how they treat employees when they are in a full blown seizure. They will literally move the person to the side and keep the line running. This place doesn't give a f— about their employees whatsoever, and it's sad. If they wouldn't treat their family that way; they shouldn't treat employees like that. Hell, you can have a heart attack on the line and be lying there half dead, and the only thing they give a shit about is how do we keep the line running. It's disgusting!"

Another worker posted an update on the injured worker's condition, writing, "The guy (my good friend) that was injured last night is okay and is home resting." While many workers expressed relief that the injured man survived, they also stressed that this does not erase what happened or the conditions that made it possible.

The incident at Ford's Chicago Assembly Plant takes place amid a broader wave of industrial accidents and corporate indifference to human life, including a recent fire at General Motors Lansing Delta Township in Michigan and unsafe conditions at the Ford Kentucky Truck Plant.

A week before the Ford worker was crushed, *CBS Chicago* reported a fire at the plant on January 19. The fire started on a conveyor belt and in the ventilation system. Firefighters were called to the roof to check ducts and vents. While no injuries were reported, the fire incident continues to highlight major issues about the plant's safety conditions.

Last April, skilled tradesman Ronald Adams, Sr. was crushed to death while performing maintenance at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Plant in Michigan. Adams' case would have been buried by management and union bureaucrats were it not for the launching of an independent inquiry by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). Evidence and testimony collected by the inquiry pointed to the use of "cheater keys" by management to override lockout/tagout procedures; after Adams' death, management quickly ordered all of these keys returned.

These conditions are the product of a political and economic system that subordinates all human life to the interests of corporate profit. Ford Motor Company reported billions of dollars in profits over the past few years while at

the same time it has cut costs through layoffs and speedup.

The UAW bureaucracy is deeply integrated into corporate management through joint labor-management committees, safety boards and profit-sharing schemes that align union officials' interests with the companies rather than the rank-and-file workers. As a result, safety complaints are ignored, incidents are downplayed, and production continues regardless of the consequences.

The injury at Ford Chicago occurred in the middle of a massive outpouring of anger in Minneapolis and across the country against the Trump administration's campaign of murder and terror against immigrants and workers in every major city.

Popular calls for a general strike are growing in opposition to plans for a dictatorship by the Trump administration, representing the interests of the corporate and financial elite that has carried out attacks on the living standards of the working class.

The sole obstacle to such a movement remains the UAW and the trade union bureaucracy as a whole. While mouthing empty words in support of a general strike, the UAW continues to keep workers on the job and working in unsafe conditions.

The experiences at the Chicago Assembly Plant and other workplaces across the country point to the urgent need for workers to form independent rank-and-file committees controlled by workers themselves.

As one rank-and-file worker told us, "If we had a say in all this, we would have said anyone who needs to go upstairs can do so. If the line has to be stopped, then the line has to be stopped and if you want to go home go home. Anyone should have had the choice to go home, not just continue working because they said so."

Rank-and-file committees of workers must take safety into their own hands, halt production when conditions are dangerous, and organize collective action independent of management and the union apparatus, and also fight to develop a broader movement to fuse the interests of workers for safety and higher living standards with the growing mass protests against dictatorship.

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