

Five workers killed because Greek biscuit factory was a death trap following years of safety violations

John Vassilopoulos
2 February 2026

Revelations have emerged about the total lack of safety precautions at the Violanta biscuit factory near the city of Trikala in the Thessaly region of central Greece, where five female workers died in a huge blast and fire in the early hours of January 26.

In a press conference last Wednesday, Anastasios Michalopoulos—the chief of Greece’s Unified Coordination Center for Operations and Crisis Management (ESKEDIK)—gave a summary of the fire service’s initial findings on the causes of the explosion, presenting evidence of an extensive propane gas leak from underground pipes.

“The leak is estimated to have lasted for several months, with detection equipment recording extremely high concentrations of propane. This significant release of propane, migrating through the ground, travelled a distance of approximately 25 meters and accumulated in an underground space, where, in the presence of sparking caused by the facility’s electromechanical equipment, led to an explosion,” he revealed.

The five dead were Vasiliki Skambardoni, 42, a mother of two; Elena Katsarou, 45, the mother of a 13-year-old; Stavroula Boukovala, a mother of three; Anastasia Nasiou, 56, also a mother of three; and Agapi Bounova, 40, a mother of two children, whose identity was confirmed by DNA testing.

The following image has been widely circulating on social media in Greece since their deaths. Its message reads: “In memory of the 5 women of the tragedy at Trikala.”

Two days after the explosion, the sister of Elena Katsarou told *Mega Channel* that workers had long feared precisely the horrific events that transpired.

“Some of the [female workers] who came to our house to offer their condolences said that the entire factory smelled, and that the women couldn’t go in the restrooms because of the odour—they would hold their noses because it smelled of LPG [liquefied petroleum gas],” she said.

“And on the shop floor as well, my mother repeatedly said that it smelled of LPG and she would say, ‘In the end, no one listens, I’m saying it for nothing—they’re going to blow us up.’ She had been saying this for a very long time—she said it for more than a month. My mother is the production supervisor on

the morning shift; my sister worked the night shift.”

On *Antenna TV*’s morning show, Katsarou’s sister also revealed that workplace accidents were a routine occurrence at the factory.

She said, “There have been many cases of workers ending up at Trikala Hospital because of a workplace accident—broken fingers, severed fingers, injured hands. None of these were reported as work-related accidents because they didn’t want them to be declared as such.”

“Agapi Bounova, who lost her life along with my sister, once had her hand caught in a machine and was left with a large mark, like a tattoo. And she used to tell me, ‘Look at what my hand looks like now.’”

The factory’s owner, Konstantinos Tziortziotis, along with two company officials—a shift manager and a safety manager—were arrested on January 27 and appeared before the local prosecutor the next day.

According to reports, Tziortziotis stated that he had also noticed an odour when he had visited the factory in the past but thought it emanated from the plant’s sewage system! All three were subsequently released while the preliminary investigation continues.

Later in the week it emerged that serious safety violations were flagged in 2020 regarding the close proximity of the two propane tanks from which the gas leaked. Rather than suspending production, the authorities issued a two-year deadline for the necessary repairs to be carried out, with no evidence that these were ever completed, let alone started.

The storage basement where the explosion occurred was never accounted for in the factory’s building plans, nor was it included in the updated fire safety plan that Violanta submitted to the fire service last autumn.

The latest revelations directly implicate the ruling New Democracy (ND) party. In 2007, while working as a freelance electrical engineer, Dimitris Papastergiou—the current Digital Governance Minister—signed off on the factory’s fire protection protocols.

In a statement posted on Facebook, Papastergiou tried to downplay his role, stating that subsequent surveys of the

factory were signed off by other engineers. This claim was contradicted by the fact that he also signed off on the factory's 2011 permit. Papastergiou was subsequently elected mayor of Trikala in 2014, serving two terms until 2023, when he joined the government as a minister after ND won a second consecutive absolute majority.

There is widespread anger at the deaths nationwide, with protests beginning in Trikala just hours after the fatalities. A local 24-hour strike was called the following day by the Trikala Labour Centre—the local branch of the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE).

A 24-hour national strike takes place on February 3 by the Panhellenic Federation of Dairy, Food and Beverage Workers and Employees (POEYGTP). A strike rally is scheduled for 10 a.m. outside the Labour Ministry in Athens. Rallies are also planned in towns and cities across the country, including Larissa—the regional capital of Thessaly—Patra, Kavala, Chania and Ioannina.

The fact that the factory was a death trap raises point blank the responsibilities borne by the trade union bureaucracy. The Trikala Labour Centre denounced the explosion and deaths as an “employer’s crime,” but evidence points to the fact that nothing was done by the unions to prevent it.

Speaking to *Proto Thema (Lead Story)* last Monday, Dimitris Armagos—the president of the Trikala Labour Centre—revealed that the union participated last summer in an inspection of the factory alongside the Labour Inspectorate.

Armagos said, “During our visit, we identified issues and made specific observations, mainly concerning the emergency exits and the system for detecting possible LPG gas leaks used in the ovens.”

Despite the gravity of these dangers, no effort was made to alert the workers to the implications of the violations. Armagos added, “We documented and pointed out the problems we identified at that time. Beyond that, I do not know what happened.”

The outcome of this normalisation of workplace safety violations is the ever-growing number of fatalities at the hands of a capitalist class freed from all meaningful regulation.

Figures compiled by the Federation of Technical Company Trade Unions (OSETEE) show that 630 workers lost their lives at work between 2022 and 2025. Of these, 201 deaths occurred in 2025 alone, up from 150 in 2024.

In addition, there were 14,920 workplace accidents in 2023, up from 14,388 in 2022 and 11,957 in 2021.

A 2024 report from the European Grouping for Insurance and Prevention of Occupational Risks (EUROGIP) found that workplace accidents were underreported by as much as a staggering 91 percent. The latest figures released by the Greek Statistical Service (ELSTAT) documented 51 work-related fatalities in 2023—a significantly smaller number than the 179 recorded by OSETEE.

This terrible toll is facilitated by the severe understaffing of

the Labour Inspectorate. According to the Labour Inspectorate's 2024 report, there are just 233 health and safety inspectors for the entire country, responsible for overseeing a labour force of approximately 4.7 million workers.

The Trikala and Karditsa region, where the Violanta factory is located, is covered by only three health and safety inspectors and their supervisor, tasked with monitoring some 12,000 businesses.

This understaffing is part of the decimation of Greece's public sector following brutal austerity and the systematic assault on working conditions imposed for more than a decade by successive governments on the working class. These measures were enacted at the behest of the European Union and International Monetary Fund following the 2008 financial crisis.

In a 2012 report, the European Federation of Public Service Unions noted that Greece's Labour Inspectorate saw its number of inspectors slashed in just three years—from 1,192 in 2008 to only 366 in 2011.

Seeking to capitalise on the Trikala deaths, the pseudo-left Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) stated that the government bears “responsibility for the anti-worker policies that it has been implementing for the past six years, for the record workplace accidents, the systematic undermining of labour inspectors and the enforcement of gruelling working hours.”

But Syriza bears as much responsibility for the onslaught on workers' health and safety, having been in power between 2015 and 2019. Swept into office with a landslide victory in January 2015 on an anti-austerity platform, Syriza abandoned its mandate within weeks.

Over the next four years, Syriza imposed austerity measures even more savage than those carried out by previous social democratic and New Democracy administrations.

According to Labour Inspectorate figures from 2017, there were just 618 inspectors remaining—just over half the pre-crisis total in 2008. Of these, only 245 were engaged in health and safety inspections.

That year, just 842 health-and-safety-related fine notices were issued, totalling €2.8 million (an average of less than €3,500 per fine). The equivalent figure in 2024 averaged just under €2,100 per violation.

Whether under Syriza or New Democracy, the paltry fines issued for health and safety violations—when they are issued at all—are easily written off as the grisly “cost of doing business.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact