

Australia: Two workers killed on the job in Brisbane in three days

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Last Friday and Monday, two workers were killed on job sites in Brisbane, the Queensland state capital, taking the city's known total workplace fatalities to five in six months. These terrible deaths point to a rising toll due to unsafe conditions and increased rates of exploitation in Australia and internationally.

Only scant details have been released by the official work safety authorities, but hundreds of people have used social media platforms to send messages of support and condolences, reflecting the concern in working-class households.

On Friday, a man in his forties died after he was crushed between two trucks at a workplace in Brisbane's east. Paramedics were called to the All Star Infrastructure site on Wynnum Road in Tingalpa at about 6.40am. The man was treated at the scene for life-threatening injuries but later died despite the paramedics' efforts.

The official state safety agency, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ), was notified and said it would investigate the circumstances with assistance from police.

On Monday, about 15 kilometres away, a worker was critically injured in a horrific workplace accident involving a forklift. Emergency services were called to Karreman Quarries on West Mount Cotton Road in Sheldon at about 2.20pm.

A Queensland Ambulance spokeswoman said four paramedic units attended the scene. Resources Safety and Health Queensland (RSHQ) confirmed on Tuesday that the man had died. Police also went to the site and are reported to be assisting WHSQ in investigating the incident.

Official investigations invariably take many months or years and cover over the driving forces of dangerous working conditions under capitalism—the systemic subordination of workers' health and lives to the interests of corporate profit, including through speed-up, subcontracting and casualisation.

There has been a wave of workplace deaths in Brisbane. In January, a worker was killed in a bulldozer rollover at the Sunstate Cement site at the Port of Brisbane. Emergency services found the worker in a life-threatening condition before declaring him dead at the scene.

The Australian Workers Union (AWU), which had members on the site, said the death was “unacceptable” but left the investigation in the hands of the police and WHSQ. Stacey Schinnerl, the Queensland secretary of the AWU, said the

union was working closely with Sunstate Cement to offer support to workers and ensure the site was safe.

In December, two workers were killed and another seriously injured on construction sites in Brisbane and the nearby Gold Coast. In the first incident, Beau Bradford, just 15, was reported to have died instantly when he was struck by a large object that fell from the boom of a concrete pump truck on a building site in Surfers Paradise.

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

After these deaths, family members and building workers raised concerns about the reported lack of safety precautions involved. They demanded action to halt the deaths and injuries caused by corporate profit-driven speed-ups and disregard for workers' lives.

These deaths are not aberrations. There has been a series of workplace fatalities in Brisbane over the past two years. In January 2025, 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.

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.

Data from Safe Work Australia indicates that by April 9, 30 workers had died nationally in 2026, following 180 deaths in 2025. According to the latest available breakdown of the statistics, in 2024, machinery operators and drivers recorded the highest number of fatalities (61 workers, or 32 percent of all deaths) and the highest fatality rate at 6.7 deaths per 100,000 workers.

Labourers faced the second-highest risk, with a fatality rate of 4.0 per 100,000 workers and 50 deaths in 2024. The industries with the highest number of fatalities were transport, postal and warehousing (54 fatalities or 29 percent), agriculture, forestry

and fishing (44 fatalities or 23 percent) and construction (37 fatalities or 20 percent).

No improvement has occurred despite industrial manslaughter becoming a criminal offence in every Australian state and territory as of late 2024. These laws are meant to punish “gross negligence” or “reckless conduct” by employers that leads to a worker’s death.

As of April 2026, there have been only six successful industrial manslaughter convictions across Australia since these laws began appearing in 2017, despite hundreds of workplace deaths being reported each year. These figures also understate the true toll because chronic occupational illnesses and unreported incidents are often excluded from official counts.

Hundreds of prosecutions have occurred for breaches of safety rules, but even companies that are convicted usually escape with token fines, amounting to a tiny fraction of their profits.

Last year’s deaths in New South Wales of a young worker at the Port Kembla steelworks and of two mineworkers in the Cobar tragedy are typical of how fatalities are treated. Work continued or quickly resumed after the deaths, the management imposed gag orders on workers and investigations were left in the hands of official agencies, ensuring no meaningful accountability.

Another example was provided in January. A coroner decided not to hold an inquest into the deaths of two workers who were crushed by a concrete wall in Brisbane in 2016, despite written pleas from family members for answers from that “terrible day.”

Ashley Pangana Morris, 34, and Humberto Ferreira Leite, 55, were killed at Brisbane’s Eagle Farm Racecourse on October 6, 2016, after becoming sandwiched between two concrete slabs. The pair had been erecting wall panels in a foul water pit, when two slabs toppled over, and one landed on them.

A WHSQ investigation found their working system did not comply with industry code of practice and was unsafe for several reasons. There was no escape route for workers in the event of a panel collapse and the bracing was structurally inadequate.

Criscon, the company in charge of the racecourse redevelopment, later pleaded guilty to two breaches of Queensland’s Work Health and Safety Act, but was fined just \$625,000.

In January, nearly a decade after the deaths, Queensland coroner Donald MacKenzie declined to hold an inquest, in part due to the mental state of a key witness. Mackenzie referred to the “egregious behaviour” of those responsible and said he hoped the evidence would “allow the deceased’s families and the general public to draw their own conclusions.”

In correspondence to the Coroners Court, Morris’s partner, Luisa Wilson wrote “everything that hasn’t happened over my partner and his colleague’s death is absolutely devastating for myself and our families.” She said the lack of criminal

prosecution was a “terrible outcome for us” which left them with “no explanations or any knowledge of what had happened that terrible day.”

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.

Last month, a disastrous blaze at an auto parts factory in Daejeon, South Korea killed 14 workers and injured 60 others, at least 25 seriously.

The US Department of Labor’s latest annual report on worker deaths found 5,070 preventable workplace fatalities in 2024, a figure that dramatically undercounts the toll when occupational illness is included.

One of the most recent deaths also involved a forklift. Austin Lewis Flores, a worker at a warehouse for the H-E-B grocery chain in San Antonio, Texas, died after he was hit by a forklift while working with a floor jack.

This month marked one year since 63-year-old Ronald Adams Sr. was killed at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Plant in Michigan. His widow, Shamenia Stewart-Adams, and co-workers have still received no official explanation of what happened. The Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration has issued no findings, and the United Auto Workers (UAW) has said nothing.

Around the world, the building of rank-and-file committees in opposition to trade union collaboration with management is essential in the fight to assert workers’ control over safety and production. Under the democratic control of workers, these committees could assess site conditions, investigate deaths and injuries, formulate demands and enforce safety measures, including through strike action.

This has to be connected to a political struggle, uniting the full power of workers across industries and national borders, to take control of basic industries and convert them into public utilities, as part of the socialist reorganisation of the world economy to protect workers’ lives and meet human need, not corporate profit.



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