

Australia: 4 workers killed on the job in southeast Queensland in recent weeks

Our correspondents
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Two more workplace deaths have been reported this week in Queensland, taking the total number of workers known to have been killed in Brisbane, the state capital, and its surrounding region to four in recent weeks.

On Tuesday, a 36-year-old worker was crushed while employees were moving large crates filled with stock at around 5:36 p.m. at a workplace in Wellcamp, near Toowoomba, a regional city about 130 kilometres west of Brisbane.

Initial police and media reports indicated that crates slipped and landed on the worker below. The man, from Harristown, a Toowoomba suburb, was assessed by paramedics at the scene for critical injuries but was declared dead a short time later.

Also reported this week was that Miikael “Mikey” Varuhin, 32, a Finnish construction worker, fell about four metres through scaffolding at a development site in Clayfield, an inner northern suburb of Brisbane, on April 6, suffering a catastrophic brain injury.

Varuhin was declared brain dead later that night. He had reportedly raised concerns about the scaffolding on site on the day he fell and had sent a photo from his phone.

The young worker’s sister, Anniina, told the media: “This is an injustice what happened—no one should go to work and never come back.” She said her young brother had moved to Brisbane seven years ago and planned to make the city his home.

The known workplace fatalities around Brisbane now total seven in six months. This is part of a rising toll due to unsafe conditions, increased rates of exploitation by employers, official coverups and government complicity in Australia and internationally.

The latest shocking deaths follow two others just reported in April.

On April 17, Chris Kelly 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 6:40 a.m. The man was treated at the scene for life-threatening injuries but later died despite the paramedics’ efforts.

On April 20, about 15 kilometres away, a worker was critically injured in a workplace accident involving a forklift. Emergency services were called to Karreman Quarries on West Mount Cotton Road in Sheldon at about 2:20 p.m.

There has been a wave of workplace deaths in or near Brisbane over the past two years, and the pace has intensified in the last six months. Most recently, 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.

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.

Repeatedly, family members and workers have raised concerns about the reported lack of safety precautions and demanded action to halt the deaths and injuries caused by corporate profit-driven speed-ups and

disregard for workers' lives.

In all these cases, the official state safety agency, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ), said it would investigate the circumstances with assistance from police, but few details have been released. Such investigations can take many months or years and always end up in whitewashes or, at best, paltry fines on employers.

Even where trade unions have members on sites, they work hand-in-hand with managements and the supposed 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, notably through speed-ups, subcontracting and casualisation.

As a result, workers' deaths continue. Data from Safe Work Australia indicates that by April 9, 30 workers had died nationally in 2026, following 180 deaths in 2025. These figures understate the true toll because chronic occupational illnesses and unreported incidents are often excluded from official counts.

Some prosecutions have eventually occurred for breaches of safety rules, but even if companies are convicted, they invariably escape with fines that amount to a tiny fraction of their profits, displaying the disregard for workers' lives by employers and the courts.

For example, in July 2024, CDC South East Queensland, part of the global ComfortDelGro transport group—whose profit rose 9.4 percent in 2024-25 to the equivalent of \$A252 million—was fined just \$180,000, plus \$1,600 in court costs, following the deaths of two young mechanics in April 2022.

The Maroochydore Magistrates Court heard that the company could have potentially prevented the deaths of employees Aaron Pitt, 25, and Lleyton Bartlett, 22, by spending \$660 to tow a broken-down bus to a safe location. Instead, it sent the pair to fix the bus on the side of a busy road, the Nambour Connection Road, where they were struck by a car.

The same indifference to workers' safety, under both Labor and Liberal-National governments, was shown in last year's deaths in neighbouring New South Wales of a young worker at the Port Kembla steelworks and of two mineworkers in an explosion at the Polymetals Resources' Endeavor silver, zinc and lead mine near Cobar.

In both these tragedies, work continued or quickly resumed after the deaths, management imposed gag orders on workers, and investigations were left in the hands of government agencies, ensuring no meaningful accountability.

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 apparatuses, must be established in workplaces everywhere to fight for improved safety, wages and conditions.

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

Above all, the rising tide of casualties shows the necessity to overturn capitalism and fight for socialism, which includes placing the basic industries, along with the banks and major corporations, under public ownership and democratic workers' control. This is an essential component of the socialist reorganisation of the world economy to protect workers' lives and meet human need, not fatten corporate profits.



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