

Industrial slaughter in Longview: 11 workers killed in Washington's deadliest workplace disaster in nearly 100 years

Jacob Crosse
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Eight workers have been confirmed killed and three others are presumed dead after a massive 900,000-gallon chemical tank ruptured Tuesday at the Nippon Dynawave Packaging mill in Longview, Washington. The death toll makes it Washington state's deadliest workplace disaster in nearly a century, since the 1930 Pacific Coast Coal Company mine explosion in Carbonado that killed 17.

The tank held “white liquor,” a highly caustic solution used in pulp processing to dissolve lignin and break wood chips down into pulp—in other words, an industrial chemical employed precisely because it aggressively attacks organic material.

The names of all the deceased have not been released, but it is known that grandfathers, fathers and husbands are among the dead.

Longview Fire Chief Brad Hannig said Thursday that the bodies of six of the nine missing workers had been recovered, stressing that the site remains an “active and hazardous recovery environment” and that recovered individuals “undergo decontamination” before being transported to the coroner—an indication of the horrific nature of a rupture that flooded the area with a caustic industrial chemical capable of burning skin, penetrating tissue and contaminating anyone who handled the bodies.

The catastrophe has also created a major environmental hazard. The Washington Department of Ecology said the rupture released white liquor into the environment, with some of the highly corrosive alkaline solution leaking into the Columbia River. Officials estimate that as much as 570,000 gallons spilled, and—after dilution by response crews—the chemical is being discharged into the river.

The Nippon Dynawave disaster is the deadliest US industrial workplace incident since the October 2025 explosions at the Accurate Energetic Systems munitions plant in Tennessee, which killed 16 workers.

The Longview site has anchored the region's timber and paper industry for a century: The Weyerhaeuser timber company arrived in 1925 and built what was then the world's largest lumber mill, opened a neighboring pulp mill in 1931, and in 2016 sold the pulp-and-paper operation to Japanese conglomerate Nippon Paper Industries for \$285 million. The multi-billion dollar conglomerate now runs the facility as Nippon Dynawave Packaging as its US subsidiary, employing about 1,000 workers producing kraft pulp,

paper and packaging.

As is almost universally the case after such disasters, reports are already emerging of a longstanding pattern of safety and environmental violations met with wrist-slap enforcement. State regulators cited Nippon Dynawave four times between 2019 and 2025, and two separate inspections were already open when the tank ruptured—one launched in March after an anonymous complaint about a valve on an aqua ammonia tank, and another opened in May over a sinkhole caused by a failed drain. Last year, after a worker lost a finger, the state cited the company for moving rigging equipment before inspectors arrived—potentially compromising the investigation—but issued no fine.

The Longview disaster is part of a widening wave of industrial fires, explosions and toxic exposures across the United States.

The same day the tank ruptured in Washington, residents in Orange County, California were still under evacuation orders (since lifted) over fears an overheating methyl methacrylate tank at GKN Aerospace could rupture or explode. Earlier this month, a fire and explosion at Robbins Lumber in Searsmont, Maine killed Morrill firefighter Andrew Cross and injured 12 others. In January, a toxic gas exposure at Woodland Pulp in Baileyville, Maine killed 20-year-old engineering intern Kasia Malcolm and 26-year-old process engineer Allen Hornberger, who died weeks later from his injuries.

The wave of industrial slaughter is global. Last Friday, 82 workers were killed in a catastrophic gas explosion at the Liushenyu Coal Mine in Shanxi province, China, the country's worst mining disaster since 2009. More than 120 workers were hospitalized, several in critical condition, and two remain missing. The mine, operated by the privately owned Shanxi Tongzhou Coal Group, had been cited in 2024 for “severe safety hazards,” including high gas levels that made it prone to explosions.

In the United States, these disasters are part of the broader carnage of American workplaces. According to the AFL-CIO's 2026 Death on the Job report, 5,070 workers were killed on the job in the United States in 2024, while an estimated 135,000 died from occupational diseases. Together, workplace hazards kill more than 380 workers every day.

The same report noted that chemical exposures “continue to plague working people” and that the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has so few inspectors, 1,651 in

all for 12 million workplaces, that it would take 191 years to inspect every workplace under its jurisdiction just once.

While workers face increasingly deadly workplaces and wages eroded by inflation, the executives who run this system keep paying themselves staggering sums. The Associated Press' latest CEO compensation survey found median CEO pay rose nearly 6 percent in 2025—and at half the companies surveyed, a worker earning the midpoint wage would need about 200 years to make what the CEO took home in a single year.

As endless sums of money are shoveled into the bank accounts of the oligarchy and the war machine, the lives of workers in the United States are cheap. This week, OSHA fined the USPS just \$26,481 for five “serious” violations that led to the death of Nicholas Acker, 36, who was crushed to death inside a mail-handling machine at the Postal Service’s Detroit Network Distribution Center in November.

The Trump administration, a government of, by and for the oligarchy, is waging war on whatever limited restraints exist on corporate profit. At the beginning of his second term, Trump signed an executive order for federal agencies to identify “at least 10” existing rules, regulations or guidance documents to repeal for every new regulation issued. In February 2026, the White House boasted of what it called the “single largest deregulatory action in American history,” presenting the gutting of environmental and safety protections as “lower prices, more freedom, and a stronger economy.”

As for the Democrats, they control both Washington state and California, and their record on workplace safety is indistinguishable from the Republicans’ in all essentials. Washington Governor Bob Ferguson served 12 years as state attorney general while Nippon Dynawave accumulated its record of citations, wrist-slap fines and open investigations. Less than 36 hours after the disaster, with workers’ bodies still inside the wreckage, the region’s Democratic congresswoman Marie Gluesenkamp Perez told reporters the federal investigation should not become “the last straw for a viable mill”—defending the company’s continued operation before the dead had even been recovered.

Amid the unending wave of industrial deaths, the trade union apparatus does precisely nothing, aside from issuing the occasional report or empty statement. The bureaucracies function as part of the corporate-state machinery of “labor relations,” not as instruments of workers’ defense. They do not organize work stoppages to halt unsafe production, nor mobilize workers to seize control of safety, nor carry out independent investigations into corporate crimes.

The same pattern holds wherever the union apparatus operates. This was on display at GKN Aerospace in Garden Grove, where Teamsters Local 952 represents production, maintenance and quality-control workers. The facility has a long record of safety and environmental violations, including chemical storage and temperature control problems. The union filed an unfair labor practice charge in April 2024 alleging refusal to bargain, only to withdraw it a month later without public explanation.

When the chemical tank crisis erupted, Teamsters President Sean O’Brien issued no indictment of the company’s record, calling

instead for “a safe resolution and a return to normalcy for the community.” The “normalcy” demanded by the union apparatus is precisely what produced the emergency: deferred maintenance, ignored warnings, regulatory wrist-slaps and continued production under unsafe conditions.

It is now just over a year since Stellantis worker Ronald Adams Sr. was killed at the Dundee Engine Complex, when an overhead gantry crane suddenly activated and crushed his upper torso. In the aftermath, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees launched an independent, worker-led investigation that exposed the cost-cutting and safety violations behind his death, as well as the UAW’s collusion and acquiescence.

The lesson of the Longview explosion—and of every workplace killing—is that workers cannot entrust their lives to corporate management, government regulators, or the trade union bureaucracies.

What is required is the building of rank-and-file safety committees in every workplace, independent of the corporations and the union apparatus, with the power to halt production over unsafe conditions, investigate injuries and deaths, and fight for workers’ control over safety and production. But this struggle cannot stop at the plant gate. The industrial slaughterhouse is rooted in a social system that subordinates human life to profit and protects the “rights” of the corporations above the right of workers to live.

The gigantic corporations that dominate industry and finance must be taken out of the hands of the capitalist oligarchy and placed under public ownership and democratic control. Only on this basis can production be reorganized to meet social need—ensuring safe workplaces, secure jobs, and a humane standard of living. The defense of the most elementary right—the right to life—requires a socialist program and the mobilization of the working class as an independent political force against the capitalist system.



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