

# Heat wave expose workers to injury and death in auto plants, warehouses and delivery routes

Tom Hall  
2 July 2026

*Tell us what conditions are like at your workplace during the heatwave by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept confidential.*

A dangerous heat wave across the Midwest and Eastern United States is exposing workers to serious injury and death in manufacturing plants, warehouses, postal facilities and delivery routes, where millions are being kept on the job without air conditioning or adequate safety measures.

Europe has just passed through a parallel heat disaster, with record-breaking heat across Western, Central and Southern Europe, with more than 150 million people affected and more than 2,000 excess deaths in Spain and France alone.

In the US, the National Weather Service's Weather Prediction Center (WPC) warned Thursday of a "prolonged and dangerous heatwave" across the Central and Eastern US, with widespread highs of 95 to 105 degrees Fahrenheit (35 to 41 C) and heat indices reaching 100 to 115 degrees Fahrenheit (38 to 46 C). The WPC warned that warm overnight lows in the mid-70s to low 80s Fahrenheit (24 to 28 C) will provide little recovery, producing widespread Major to Extreme Heat Risk and increased danger of heat-related illness, especially for those without adequate cooling.

Local governments are treating the heat wave as a public health emergency. New York City activated an emergency heat plan, opening hundreds of cooling centers, deploying COOL vans and expanded pop-up cooling stations for outdoor workers, and directing thousands of LinkNYC kiosks to display routes to nearby cooling centers.

Philadelphia extended its Heat Health Emergency through Sunday, July 5, keeping more than 50 cooling centers open, suspending water shutoffs, declaring a Code Red for people living outdoors and adding misting tents, hydration stations and medical tents for July 4 and World Cup events.

The power grid is also under acute strain. PJM Interconnection, the largest US grid operator, implemented emergency measures Thursday. Reuters reported that PJM ordered all generators to run at full capacity, brought idle plants back online and prepared demand-response measures as operating reserves fell sharply.

Heat-related emergency department visits are rising sharply. In the Department of Health and Human Services' Region 5,

covering Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin, the CDC Heat and Health Tracker figure rose from 183 on Sunday to 1,536 on Wednesday. Region 3, covering the Mid-Atlantic, rose from 72 to 1,162, while Region 2, including New York and New Jersey, rose from 91 to 942.

New York City heat-related emergency department visits rose from two on June 27 to 43 on July 1, the highest figure of the year so far, on a day when the high temperature reached 103 degrees Fahrenheit (39 C).

These emergency measures contrast with the reality facing workers. In factories, warehouses and delivery operations, employers are keeping production and delivery moving under conditions that workers themselves describe as dangerous.

At Ford Dearborn Truck Plant, workers reported Wednesday that managers and maintenance supervisors were issuing orders to remove or cover electrical receptacles used by workers to power fans at their workstations. All plugged-in fans must be removed by July 13, according to the order described by workers.

News of the order spread through the plant as workers faced temperatures above 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 C). "Taking fans from workers is just backwards and tells us how little the company thinks of the workers," one worker wrote. "I have no doubt this is a plot to make workers want to quit and/or set the lines up for robots to just force people out."

Another worker denounced Ford's claim that the fans posed a safety issue. "So they want to take fans away when it's hotter than hell out? Talking about 'it's a safety hazard.' That's some certified B.S. and we all know it." The worker added, "Let's see how much of a hazard [there will be] when you have people fall out from over HEATING or God forbid somebody has a heat stroke."

Ford workers are already dealing with massive workload increases since the new contract was ratified in 2023, which was immediately followed by layoffs. "It's insane," a Dearborn worker said. "Where is the union?"

At Ford Chicago Assembly Plant, a worker described conditions as "tragic, overheated, miserable." Workers report that ambulances are regularly stationed at the back of the plant for workers who fall ill from the heat.

At GM Flint, a worker confronted the chairman of United

Auto Workers Local 598 on an internal message board over getting “cheap headbands” instead of cooling towels in a 110-degree Fahrenheit (43 C) heat index.

The response from the bureaucracy was to defend management. “The company was trying to do things like popcycles [sic], cooling towels and head bands to show empathy for the heat,” the official wrote. “Its not something they are required to do so dont take one if you dont like it [sic].”

A factory worker in Missouri said, “People drop and get put in ambulances daily. Specifically around the bath where they do a pressure test with boiling water on the cans. They mostly put women there--at least in the hot times. If a can fails, you put on a thick glove and fish it out. Combined with this oppressive heat, the humidity drops people regularly.”

A postal worker reported that at one location, carriers refused to begin delivery until management purchased more water. “They sat in break room till they brought water into office,” one postal worker said. “They had no cooling towels which they are to supply and no water. It isn’t like they didn’t know how hot it was going to be.”

Another postal worker texted: “Hard to breathe and coughing but I’ll be back tomorrow. My heart rate was 125. A hot mess.” Another carrier wrote, “Every carrier should call off and let these assholes go out and deliver mail instead of sitting on their ass in AC.”

At UPS in Knoxville, Tennessee, Teamsters Local 519 issued a July 1 letter acknowledging “serious complaints” about conditions in the Knoxville building. The letter said the building had operated under “extreme temperatures,” that egress conditions were “outrageous,” and that workers had been “physically lying on the floor due to these working conditions.” Corporate supervisors, it said, “walked around them without regard for the situation,” while stewards stayed with affected workers to monitor them.

A public post from East TN Teamsters Facebook page said employees had become “so affected by the conditions that some were lying on the floor,” while management continued operations and walked past affected employees.

Delivery drivers are particularly at risk, with heat-related deaths virtually an annual occurrence in American summers. In June 2023, Dallas letter carrier Eugene Gates Jr. collapsed and died while delivering mail during a heat wave, with the heat index reaching 115 degrees Fahrenheit (46 C). In 2024, USPS worker Wednesday “Wendy” Johnson died after working for hours in the back of a mail truck in Fayetteville, North Carolina, where text messages reported temperatures of 102 degrees Fahrenheit (39 C) in the truck. In 2025, Dallas-area letter carrier Jacob Taylor and Grand Junction, Colorado carrier Dan Workman died while working routes in extreme heat.

The US Postal Service is only partway through replacing its aging Long Life Vehicles, many of which lack air conditioning and have remained in service far beyond their expected

lifespan. At UPS, the Teamsters bureaucracy promoted a contract that required air conditioning only in newly purchased small-package delivery vehicles beginning January 1, 2024. A later agreement commits UPS to retrofit only 5,000 package cars with air conditioning by June 2027, with a pilot program for A/C vented into the cargo compartment covering just 100 package cars.

Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker in Macungie, Pennsylvania and socialist candidate for UAW president, issued a statement Thursday calling on workers to take control over safety conditions as the heat wave spreads across factories, warehouses, construction sites, farms and delivery routes.

“Workers must have the right to stop the line and halt production when heat or any other condition threatens health and safety, with no retaliation, discipline or loss of pay,” Lehman said. “All workers must receive paid heat breaks, unlimited access to cool water and electrolytes, shaded and air-conditioned rest areas, and medical attention on demand.

“Production rates must be reduced or production halted when heat indices reach dangerous levels, including inside plants where machinery, concrete, poor ventilation and physical labor make conditions worse than outside readings suggest. All workplaces must be equipped with proper climate controls, including air conditioning and ventilation, paid for by the companies.

“Workers must receive full pay for any shutdown caused by unsafe heat, storms, power failures, wildfire smoke, pandemics or other emergencies. All heat-related incidents, near misses, hospitalizations and complaints must be reported immediately and made public to the entire workforce.”

Lehman called for replacing “worthless joint labor-management safety committees” with safety committees “made up entirely of active workers elected by and accountable to the rank and file,” adding, “No worker should die for a truck or any other commodity. Workers must unite, take control over safety, and fight for a system based on human need, not private profit.”

Workers cannot wait for management, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) or the union bureaucracies to act after more people collapse or die. Rank-and-file committees must be built in every workplace to monitor conditions, report heat illness and near misses, stop work when conditions are unsafe, demand full pay during heat-related shutdowns and link workers across plants, warehouses, routes and industries.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**