

Workers swelter at worksites and in factories, as new heat wave moves across the United States

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14 July 2026

A heat dome bringing potentially deadly temperatures is spreading from the Western US to the Eastern states this week. It is producing record or near-record temperatures at some locations. Salt Lake City, Utah saw its highest temperature ever recorded this past weekend, 109° Fahrenheit (43° Celsius). Billings, Montana recorded 111° Fahrenheit (44° Celsius), also a record.

The heat is spreading across the Rockies and northern plains east to Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan. Heat advisories have been extended further east, including Pennsylvania, New York, Massachusetts and Maine. The National Weather Service has issued extreme heat warnings and advisories for the entire state of Michigan, predicting that temperatures could reach in excess of 100° F (38° C) Wednesday.

Increasing the health risks are not just the daytime high temperatures, but the fact that temperatures are not cooling down at night, staying in the 70-80° F range (21-27° C). This means the body's core temperature does not have a chance to cool down and recover. Even a few degrees increased body temperature can lead to heat stroke.

This is the second bout of deadly heat to afflict the US this summer. It follows a series of climate change-driven killer heat waves in Europe that led to more than 14,000 excess deaths and now the spread of heat-driven wildfires. Estimates put heat deaths at over 5,000 in Germany, more than 2,700 in Britain and over 2,000 in France.

Michigan and neighboring Midwestern states are home to tens of thousands of autoworkers, who are being forced to continue laboring this week in sweltering factories, most without air conditioning or in

some cases even fans.

Logistics and warehouse workers are also vulnerable to extreme heat. Most postal delivery and UPS vehicles still lack air conditioning, putting drivers at risk. Recent on-the-job deaths due to heat include Wendy Johnson, a 51-year-old postal supervisor in Fayetteville, North Carolina who died in June 2024 while working in the back of a mail truck without air conditioning. In June 2025, Jacob Taylor, a 28-year veteran letter carrier, collapsed and died from the heat while walking his mail route in Dallas, Texas.

Heat is a well known workplace safety hazard, with an estimated 48 or more workers dying in heat-related incidents each year, likely an undercount. Most of these are related to heat stroke, when the body's core temperature reaches 104° F (40° C) or higher. Heat-related illness or death can also occur at more moderate temperatures, when a worker is engaged in strenuous activity or has breathing restricted by protective gear.

The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has no formal heat-related rules governing worker safety. Instead it has a number of toothless employer recommendations for when workplace temperatures rise above 80° or 90° F (26.6° or 32.2° C). A complete cessation of work under hazardous heat conditions is not one of them.

Reports from autoworkers in Michigan detail the some of the extreme conditions that exist in workplaces around the US during the heatwave.

An autoworker at the Ford Rouge complex in Dearborn, Michigan told the WSWS, "During a heat wave, workers have received news that the electricity outlets on the assembly line were going to be removed, leaving workers without fans in factories during 90+° F

(32.2° C) weather conditions. Workers are receiving AWOL's (away without leave) for not showing up to face this heat. In days past there have been workers who have passed away because of heat exhaustion, so in a way this is a huge slap in the face to workers. Personal battery-powered fans have been raised as a remedy, but workers still need electric outlets to recharge fans!"

A worker at the Detroit Assembly Complex-Jefferson plant said, "We constantly see EMS trucks pulling up to the plant because a worker passed out from the heat."

While the National Weather Service and local municipalities have issued heat advisories urging residents to limit heavy physical labor and outdoor activities during the heat wave, there have been no similar advisories issued by the United Auto Workers or corporate management expressing concern for workers' safety. As during the pandemic, workers' health, safety and lives take a back seat to the corporate drive for production and profit.

A Nexteer worker in Saginaw, Michigan spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about the oppressive heat inside the plant. The UAW rammed through a sellout deal at the plant that makes steering equipment last month after workers decisively rejected the deal in three previous votes. Workers at the plant have formed a rank-and-file committee as the genuine voice of workers.

"The intense heat drains our bodies, our muscles feel like rubber," the Nexteer worker said. "These conditions in the plant are life-threatening. The company does not even appreciate us being there. We only have AC in our break room, and our lunch is only 20 minutes, and our breaks are only 13 minutes. There's not really very much time for us to recover.

"Parts of the plant are cooler—to protect the parts, not us! They just want us to keep working. Management and the union have air conditioning but not us. Why don't we have air conditioning?! Their profits are more important than us workers."

Stellantis workers at the Detroit Assembly Complex-Jefferson walked into their shifts with their electric fans Tuesday afternoon, as outside temperatures reached 98° F (36.6° C), with "real feel" temperatures of 108° F (42.2° C). On top of that, smoke from wildfires in the US and Canada resulted in an air quality alert.

One worker condemned the indifference of UAW officials to the conditions shop floor workers face during such heat waves. "They don't care. In my eight years here, I've never seen a UAW rep walk the floor, unless it's election time. We pay these dues while union reps sit on their asses in air conditioned offices living off our dues."

She said she was disgusted by the infighting inside the UAW apparatus over the divvying up of positions and perks to relatives. Referring to UAW President Shawn Fain, she said, "He got our hopes up with his promises, but he hasn't done anything. It's one thing to go on TV and make speeches, it's another thing to fight."

She commented on the walkouts that workers carried out in March 2020 when COVID-19 was first spreading through the plants. "Workers walked out because the company and the union were concerned with profits, not people's lives. Now, they are running and running the plants, to stockpile cars so they can take our jobs."

Another older worker at the loading dock area said, "They've got air recirculating over cool water, and it does something. It's about 10 degrees cooler inside than out here—but it's still hot, especially when you're near the open loading dock doors. Workers should be able to shut things down if it's unsafe. That's the way it used to be. Now it's all about the numbers and the yahoo Fain is giving up everything that we once had."

The fight for a safe and healthy workplace requires that workers take the fight for health and safety into their own hands by building rank-and-file committees, like the workers at Ford Rouge and Nexteer. These committees should monitor conditions, stop work when conditions are unsafe, oppose victimizations and link up with workers across plants, industries and national borders.



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