Veteran autoworker James Brasher killed in industrial accident at Stellantis MOPAR facility in Detroit suburbs

Our reporter
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In yet another industrial tragedy, James Brasher, a Stellantis worker with more than 30 years seniority, died August 1 at the company's Mopar Division, Center Line National Parts Distribution Center just north of Detroit. Brasher, a laborer and member of United Auto Workers Local 1248, was working on renovations at the facility at the time of his death, according to the union. Few other details have been released by either management or the UAW.

Brasher, a father, leaves behind family and coworkers who are now confronting the same wall of corporate silence that has greeted every previous death of an autoworker at Stellantis and across the auto industry.

According to a management statement, the death occurred in a building which "previously housed Mopar's administrative functions" and "is currently unoccupied as the company has relocated those operations to Auburn Hills."

Stellantis sold the Center Line complex as part of agreements related to the sellout 2023 contract that sanctioned the closure of 10 Mopar facilities and the consolidation of parts operations at a "mega hub" in Van Buren Township, about 25 miles southwest of Detroit. In the interim it maintained operations in Center Line through a "leaseback" agreement.

As of July 28 Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) had recorded 21 workplace deaths in the state, including three trench collapses in a two-day period resulting in one fatality.

A joint statement issued by UAW President Shawn Fain and UAW Vice President for Stellantis Rich Boyer declared, "A member of our union went to work today expecting to complete his shift and return home to his loved ones, but sadly, that will not happen.

"The UAW will investigate and demand details from the company of exactly how this tragedy occurred to ensure this kind of accident never happens again."

Responding to the statement, a Stellantis Mopar worker posted on Facebook, "With all due respect, words are not enough. They say they don't want another tragedy, but where was the urgency before a member lost his life?

"At the Center Line Mopar facility, management has been writing employees up after they get injured on the job. When workers fear disciplinary action for reporting injuries or accidents, they become afraid to speak up about unsafe conditions. That creates a culture of silence instead of safety."

Another worker posted, "Prayers for his family and fellow union members and coworkers, in general management doesn't spend as much effort on any safety concerns until someone gets severely injured or passes away in the plants, of course the company always claims they were still alive when they left the plant as I recall that was said when we had a skilled tradesman cut in half by a machine in Indiana."

Will Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president, issued the following statement on Brasher's death.

> I want to express my deepest condolences to the family, friends and coworkers of James Brasher. He is the latest victim of a system that sacrifices workers' lives to corporate profit. In the last two years, we have lost at least five other brothers in the UAW: Daulton Simmers at Caterpillar, Frank Logsdon at Metalsa, Antonio Gaston at Toledo Jeep, Ronald Adams Sr. at Dundee Engine and Gregory Knopf at Ford Sharonville. Far from protecting our lives, the joint UAW-management safety committees protect the corporations.
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> It isn't a matter of correcting issues after the fact but of preventing them before workers are injured or killed. That will only happen when workers take health and safety into our own hands. That means establishing rank-and-file committees in every plant with the power to shut down production until we decide conditions are safe enough to work.
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> Two weeks ago, workers at Stellantis plants across Metro Detroit were forced to breathe some of the most toxic air ever recorded in a major American city. Workers collapsed. Workers were carried out on stretchers. While UAW President Shawn Fain waited more than 24 hours before posting a Facebook message

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"urging" employers to do the right thing, Vice President Rich Boyer sent a letter to Stellantis locals on July 17 claiming that UAW Industrial Hygienists had verified air quality "remains within acceptable limits." That letter tells every autoworker in this country what the joint safety apparatus exists to do. It does not protect workers. It certifies that poisoned air is contractually acceptable, so the line never stops.

Any "investigation" carried out by the UAW, management and government safety agencies will only result in another cover-up. If James Brasher's family and co-workers are to get the truth they deserve and if those responsible are to be held accountable, rank-and-file workers will have to conduct an investigation themselves.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) demonstrated in the investigation of the death of Ronald Adams Sr. that workers, acting collectively and independently, can uncover what the company and the bureaucracy have a legal and financial interest in burying.

If you work at the Center Line facility or anywhere in the Stellantis network' and you know what led to James Brasher's death—if you have witnessed safety corners being cut, if you know about the conditions on that renovation project, if you have seen things that supervisors and union reps told you to forget—I am urging you to come forward. Your identity will be protected. You will not fight alone.

James Brasher deserved to come home. His family deserves the truth. And every autoworker in this country deserves a union that actually fights for their lives. That is not the UAW under Fain and Boyer. It can only be won through the independent organization of the rank and file to abolish the bureaucracy and transfer power to workers on the shop floor.

During the July 30 UAW presidential candidate debate, Lehman spoke about the industrial slaughterhouse in America, while Fain, Boyer and the other candidates were silent on this issue. "Every year in this country, more than 5,000 workers die on the job because safety is subordinated to profit," Lehman said in his opening statement, adding, "In our plants, Antonio Gaston, Ronald Adams Sr., Gregory Knopf were crushed to death under the 2023 contract that this leadership called 'historic.'"

A pattern of death and cover-up

The UAW bureaucracy has responded to the death of James Brasher the same way it has done before: issuing condolences and promises of investigations even as it conspires with management to cover up their mutual responsibility.

On August 21, 2024, Antonio Gaston, a 53-year-old father of four, was crushed to death on the assembly line at Stellantis' Toledo Jeep Complex. He had been displaced from the Belvidere, Illinois plant that Stellantis shuttered in 2023, part of the company's savage job-cutting campaign sanctioned by the UAW contract. Workers at Toledo described a plant where job cuts had concentrated work onto fewer people, where the pressure to keep the line moving was relentless and where safety mechanisms were subordinated to production targets. UAW Local 12 President Bruce Baumhower at the plant never returned WSWS calls for comment.

On April 7, 2025, Ronald Adams Sr., a 63-year-old machine repairman known to his coworkers as "the protector of the plant," was crushed to death at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Complex when an overhead gantry crane suddenly activated while he performed maintenance. In the sixteen months since his death, neither MIOSHA, Stellantis, nor the UAW apparatus has released a single finding.

Adam's widow, Shamenia Stewart-Adams, has received not a single letter, call or explanation. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) conducted its own independent investigation and found that management, with the acquiescence of the UAW, had systematically bypassed lockout/tagout procedures, using "cheater keys" distributed to workers during a rushed production launch. The UAW's response was to post a video on Workers Memorial Day—the very day Adams was buried—featuring UAW Stellantis Department Director Kevin Gotinsky praising the "joint efforts" of the company and union while implicitly blaming workers for their own deaths.

On March 16, 2026, Gregory Knopf, 64, a pipefitter and father of three at Ford's Sharonville Transmission Plant in Ohio, was pinned against equipment and killed when a press machine activated during routine maintenance—a virtual replay of the killing of Ronald Adams Sr.

These tragedies must end. But that will only be possible when workers build organizations on the shop floor that place their needs before corporate profit.

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