Stellantis worker James Brasher killed on the job—the fourth death under the UAW's "historic" 2023 contract

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James Brasher, a 57-year-old Stellantis worker with more than 30 years seniority and a member of United Auto Workers Local 1248, died Saturday, August 1 at the company's Mopar Parts Distribution Center in Center Line, Michigan. Brasher is the fourth Big Three autoworker killed since the sellout of the 2023 contract struggle and at least the 16th UAW member killed on the job in the last four years.

Very little information has been released to the public. A brief post Monday on the state of Michigan's 2026 Fatality Information site said Brasher was discarding decommissioned equipment through a roll-up door on the second floor of the building when he fell 25 feet into a trash dumpster below. Paul Myszenski, director of Center Line Public Safety, said Brasher appeared to have been killed instantly. Rushing to shift the blame to the dead worker, Myszenski said Brasher was wearing a safety harness but it was not attached to a tether that could have prevented the fall.

Predictably, the global automaker, with a market capitalization of over $21 billion, claimed "the safety of our employees is our number one priority."

Commenting on a local news report, one of Brasher's co-workers posted, "The headline calls him an auto worker. We knew him as James—a husband, a father, a coworker, a friend, and a human being. In more than 27 years of working at Chrysler, I have never seen management respond so coldly or so blatantly to the death of a coworker... Yesterday, many of us were left with the painful feeling that our CID is all we are. Just another number. Just another name on the payroll. Just another burden to be removed from the books."

UAW President Shawn Fain and UAW Vice President Richard Boyer issued a joint statement Saturday that included obligatory condolences but proposed no action. They said 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."

In fact, the conditions that led to Brasher's death are the direct product of the sellout 2023 UAW-Stellantis contract and the bogus "Stand Up" strike, which involved less than a third of the UAW's 44,000 Stellantis members. The "historic victory" hailed by Fain and Boyer in November 2023 sanctioned the closure of 19 US facilities, including half of all parts distribution centers across the US.

The Center Line building—once the national headquarters of Mopar—was sold in January 2025 and is being leased back by Stellantis until the opening of a $388 million automated Detroit Mega Hub in 2027. The new Amazon-style facility will use an automated selection and delivery system that will eliminate hundreds of jobs. Brasher was dumping discarded office furniture and equipment from one of the 10 PDC facilities already condemned to close.

Brasher is the fourth Big Three worker killed under this contract. On August 21, 2024, Antonio Gaston, a 53-year-old father of four, was crushed to death at the Stellantis Toledo Assembly Complex. On April 7, 2025, Ronald Adams Sr., a 63-year-old machine repairman known as "the protector of the plant," was crushed to death at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Complex when an overhead gantry crane suddenly activated during maintenance. On March 16, 2026, Gregory Knopf, a 64-year-old pipefitter at Ford's Sharonville Transmission Plant in Ohio, was killed when a press machine activated during routine maintenance—a virtual replay of Adams's death.

Sixteen months after the death of Ronald Adams Sr., neither MIOSHA, nor Stellantis nor the UAW has released a single finding. His widow, Shamenia Stewart-Adams, has received not one letter, not one call, not one explanation. On Workers Memorial Day—the very day Adams was buried—the UAW posted a video featuring Stellantis Department Director Kevin Gotinsky praising "joint efforts" with the company while implicitly blaming workers themselves.

The only investigation that has produced the truth was conducted by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-

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and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). Drawing on dozens of worker interviews, the IWA-RFC found that management, with UAW acquiescence, had distributed "cheater keys" that bypassed lockout/tagout protections during a rushed production launch. After Adams was killed, management ordered workers to return the keys under threat of termination.

Brasher's death came two weeks after wildfires blanketed Metro Detroit with the most toxic air ever recorded in a major American city, with the Air Quality Index hitting 698 on July 16-17—the worst on earth. Workers were sent into the plants anyway. As first responders removed workers from smoke-filled factories on stretchers, Fain waited more than 24 hours before posting a Facebook message "urging" employers to protect workers. Boyer sent a letter to Stellantis locals claiming UAW Industrial Hygienists had verified air quality "remains within acceptable limits."

The joint safety apparatus does not protect workers. It certifies that poisoned air is contractually acceptable, so the line never stops.

Two days before Brasher was killed, the UAW held a presidential candidate forum on July 30. The debate revealed the chasm between Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and socialist, and the five other candidates, all contending for control of an apparatus sitting on $1.25 billion in net assets. Fain, under federal criminal investigation, called the 2023 contract "brilliant." Boyer defended it.

Lehman alone rejected the claim. "It was not a real strike. It was a disaster. It was a Hollywood strike," he said. And he alone raised the toll of dead workers: "Every year in this country, more than 5,000 workers die on the job because safety is subordinated to profit. In our plants, Antonio Gaston, Ronald Adams Sr., Gregory Knopf were crushed to death under the 2023 contract that this leadership called 'historic.'"

Lehman also denounced Fain's inaction and Boyer's letter during the wildfire crisis and called for rank-and-file committees with the power to shut down production until workers decide conditions are safe. Not one of the other candidates addressed a word on this.

"What we need is a strategy and an organization," Lehman said in his opening statement, "class struggle instead of class collaboration, internationalism instead of nationalism, rank-and-file committees in every plant and workplace, controlled by workers, linked across industries, to abolish the bureaucracy and transfer power to the shop floor." The other candidates all supported Trump's tariff regime, with Fain boasting of "working very close" with the administration.

In a statement on Brasher's death released Sunday, Lehman declared that workers must "take health and safety into our own hands." Pointing to the IWA-RFC investigation into Adams's death, he said: "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."

He urged workers to come forward: "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—come forward. Your identity will be protected. You will not fight alone."

The sequence is damning. On Thursday, Lehman warned that the 2023 contract was a death sentence and named the dead. Fain, Boyer and the other candidates sat in silence. On Saturday, James Brasher was dead. The statements issued afterward—"the UAW will investigate," "safety is our number one priority"—are the script the apparatus follows after every death. It has produced not one finding, not one prosecution, not one change in the conditions that send 15 workers to their graves every day in America's industrial slaughterhouse.

James Brasher deserved to come home. His family deserves the truth. The only way workers can defend their safety and health is by forming rank-and-file committees in every plant, controlled by workers, with the power to stop production the moment conditions become unsafe. This must be combined with a political struggle by the working class in the US and internationally to put an end to capitalism, which sacrifices human life to corporate profit every day.

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