26-year-old South Australian worker killed in woodchipper accident

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Twenty-six-year-old Josh Thomson-Parkin was killed on August 11 in an industrial accident involving heavy machinery in Charleston in South Australia's Adelaide Hills.

Thomson-Parkin was employed by Mechanical Vegetation Solutions (MVS), which was engaged as a contractor at the semi-rural local government-owned property. He was working alone at the site, operating a large woodchipper.

With no coworkers or supervisors on site, Thomson-Parkin's death was only discovered the next morning by his father, Max Parkin, who went to the property to look for him after the young man's wife, Mekayla Stansbury Williams, reported that he had not returned home.

Parkin told 7 News: "I don't understand. His boss should have found him, not me. Why were there no workers there to make sure he finished work?"

Thomson-Parkin's family said the woodchipper had been exhibiting problems in the days before the fatal incident. His mother, Tanya Thomson, said he had sent the family a video showing him repeatedly having to unclog the machine, while his father said he had raised concerns with him about the machinery the night before his death.

The family told 7 News they believed Thomson-Parkin was attempting to clear a blockage when the barrel of the machine fell on him.

For Thomson-Parkin's family and friends, the death has brought an immeasurable loss. His mother described him as "empathetic to a fault," with a "fantastic work ethic," adding that he was "quirky, funny, loving" and would "give anyone the shirt off his back." Friends similarly remembered him as hardworking, generous and a "social butterfly."

A GoFundMe page set up by the South Australian Society of Arboriculture on behalf of the family has raised more than $48,000.

The circumstances surrounding Thomson-Parkin's death raise fundamental questions about workplace safety and the role of the trade union bureaucracy.

The Timber, Furnishing and Textiles Union (TFTU) claims it had warned both MVS and SafeWork SA over the practice of workers being left alone to operate dangerous machinery. Union secretary Dave Kirner said the union contacted SafeWork SA in April 2026—four months before Thomson-Parkin's death—to request an inspection of the company's work practices.

Despite knowing workers were allegedly being left alone with hazardous equipment, the union did not call for workers to refuse unsafe work or demand the employer immediately rectify the danger. Instead, the union's only action was to insist that workers could entrust their health and lives to SafeWork SA, which, like the so-called safety regulators throughout the country, serves to whitewash the responsibility of companies for worker deaths and serious injuries.

Following the fatality, SafeWork SA confirmed its inspectors had identified non-compliance with health and safety laws and issued two "prohibition notices" stopping some activities at the company's worksites. Such intervention, however, came only after a young worker had been killed.

Now, SafeWork SA has launched an investigation into Thomson-Parkin's death. Based on previous investigations, this will drag on for several years, in an attempt to dissipate anger, before delivering a finding that will likely amount to nothing more than a slap on the wrist for the company.

This is because the safety regulators, as well as the unions and Labor governments that promote them, do not represent the interests of workers, but of big

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business. Above all, their concern is to cover over the underlying cause of workplace deaths—capitalism, under which everything, including the safety of workers, is subordinated to profit.

Thomson-Parkin's death is part of a far broader workplace crisis confronting the working class. South Australia recorded 26 workplace deaths in 2024–25, the highest number in the state's history and twice the 13 recorded the previous year. Eight of those killed worked in agriculture, forestry and fishing, with machinery and vehicles among the recurring causes of death.

The toll has continued into 2025–26, including the deaths of 41-year-old contractor Roy Goodridge at Pompoota in August 2025 and 24-year-old Jesse Upton at the Costa mushroom farm in Monarto in March this year.

The record death toll has coincided with repeated assurances from governments and regulators that workplace safety is being strengthened. Yet the recent industrial manslaughter charges against Adelaide company Nylastex Tooling and its directors over the 2024 death of 28-year-old Lachlan Carslake demonstrate the devastating consequences of serious safety failures. Prosecutors allege that a machine's guarding system had been disabled despite safety concerns being raised just two days before Carslake was killed.

Across Australia, an average of 191 workers are killed on the job each year, more than one every two days.

In November 2025, 24-year-old Jack McGrath was killed when he was struck by a falling steel beam at BlueScope's Port Kembla steelworks in New South Wales (NSW), where workplace injuries had risen sharply over preceding years.

Since McGrath's death, there have been at least six dangerous incidents at the site involving building supplies and tools falling from height, and one worker seriously injured. These took place even as SafeWork NSW claimed it was taking a "proactive approach" to monitoring safety at BlueScope, and the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union boasted of being "on site regularly pushing safety and compliance."

The reality is that, for decades, unions have collaborated with employers and governments in enforcing job cuts, speed-ups, casualisation and the erosion of working conditions, while suppressing the independent struggles of workers against these attacks. Their response after workers are killed is invariably to call for investigations and cooperate with regulators, police and management, functioning to contain workers' anger rather than organise a struggle against the conditions that produced the tragedy.

This is not uniquely Australian, but an international phenomenon, in which the trade union bureaucracy has integrated itself into the structures of corporate management and the capitalist state, subordinating workers' lives and conditions to the demands of "international competitiveness" and profit.

Workers in SA confront the same struggle as workers throughout Australia and internationally. The defence of workers' lives requires the development of independent rank-and-file committees, independent from the union bureaucracy and Labor, to oppose unsafe working conditions and unify workers across workplaces, industries and national borders in a common struggle against the employers and governments responsible for subordinating human life to capitalist profit.

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