Autoworker crushed at Kentucky auto parts plant, 1 day after Governor celebrated its expansion

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Bradley Clouse, a 33-year-old maintenance worker was killed on the job early Wednesday morning at the Astemo Americas auto parts plant in Berea, Kentucky, just one day after Governor Andy Beshear and local officials visited the facility to celebrate a major corporate expansion. The non-union factory produces steering and suspension components for the auto industry.

According to WBON-TV, Clouse was reportedly investigating varnish leaking from a piece of robotic equipment and entered the machine to attempt a repair when he was crushed. The equipment was reportedly locked out at the time, making it unclear how the machinery was able to move or otherwise cause fatal injuries. The exact circumstances of the incident remain under investigation.

There are conflicting reports as to the proximate time of the incident. However, Berea Police Department Sgt. Barry Manley, speaking with The Edge stated that they had "received a call at 6:50 this morning about an injured maintenance worker who was crushed by machinery he was attempting to work on after it failed." Other outlets, citing the *Lexington Herald-Leader*, reported Clouse was struck on the head—a discrepancy that has not been reconciled and underscores how little has been officially confirmed.

As one worker reported on Facebook on late Wednesday afternoon, the factory immediately shut down production and sent all workers on the floor home and did not continue with production. Astemo communications manager Hiromi Mizuno confirmed operations were suspended and said grief counseling was available to employees.

The preliminary cause of death is considered to be blunt force trauma. According to Deputy Coroner Carlos Coyle, the official cause of death will be announced within two to three months by state officials. The worker's remains have been sent to Frankfort for an autopsy, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is involved since the death occurred within the plant.

The circumstances of Clouse's death point directly to the conditions imposed on workers throughout the auto industry. They also point to a documented history at this specific plant.

A documented history of machine-guarding violations

OSHA's own inspection database shows the Berea facility—operating first as Hitachi Automotive Systems Americas, Inc. and later as Hitachi Astemo Americas, Inc., at the same 301 Mayde Road address—has been cited twice for violating the identical federal machine-guarding standard, 29 CFR 1910.212(a)(1), which requires employers to guard against hazards from point of operation, ingoing nip points, rotating parts, and flying chips or sparks.

In February 2016, a referral-triggered inspection—conducted under OSHA's National Emphasis Program specifically targeting amputation hazards—resulted in a Serious citation and a $7,000 penalty. Five years later, in December 2020, a second referral-triggered inspection at the same address resulted in another citation under the same standard, this time classified as Repeat—a designation OSHA reserves for a violation of a "substantially similar condition" to one already cited within the prior five years. The 2021 citation carried a mere $35,000 penalty and was contested before being resolved through formal settlement. The case remained open for nearly five years, closing only on November 25, 2025—roughly nine months before Clouse's death.

The circumstances surrounding this young worker's death are similar to those that killed 63-year-old Ronald Adams Sr., a machine repairman crushed to death at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Complex in Michigan in April 2025, when an overhead gantry crane activated while he was performing maintenance. An independent investigation by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees found that lockout/tagout protections at Dundee had been systematically bypassed through the widespread use of "cheater keys"—skeleton keys that defeat the entire safety system—with the acquiescence of the United Auto Workers unions. A former OSHA compliance officer concluded the plant had "virtually no functioning lockout/tagout system," approaching criminal negligence. The Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration has still not released the findings of its investigation nearly 17 months since Adams' death.

The pattern has continued unabated. In March of this year, 64-year-old Gregory Knopf was killed at Ford's Sharonville Transmission Plant in Ohio when a press machine activated during routine maintenance and pinned him against equipment—a death, the WSWS noted, bearing "a direct and grim resemblance" to that of Adams Sr. Bradley Clouse is the latest entry in this slaughter.

These deaths are not accidents. They are the predictable outcome of an industry where corporations systematically under invest in maintenance and safety while intensifying the pace of production to extract maximum profit—and where a maintenance worker is sent to repair machinery that has broken down as a matter of routine.

Reviews from Astemo Berea workers posted to Indeed describe conditions directly bearing on the documented violation history. One review focused specifically on maintenance conditions stated: “If you like doing maintenance work for them while they also complain about you this is a great place. If maintenance can’t fix it by fixing a simple broken wire or smacking it with a hammer they are helpless. Managers across the board (including engineer) are clueless.” Another worker described being expected “to do several peoples jobs every night and with little to no help. No appreciation, the more you do the more they expect.”

Reaction to Clouse’s death spread quickly through local social media and news comment sections as well. Responding to WKYT’s report on the death, one commenter wrote: “Brother, osha needs to inspect every factory in that tri county you think this is the only incident? It’s like this in almost all of them.”

Kentucky has long been among the most dangerous places to work in the United States, with workplace injury and fatality rates above the national average. Last year, state authorities moved to further weaken workplace safety standards, turning back the clock on protections in a state where the Democratic governor and Republican legislature compete to offer corporations the cheapest, least-regulated conditions for extracting surplus value.

Astemo Americas is a division of Astemo Ltd., a privately held Japanese joint venture headquartered in Tokyo, with more than 15,000 employees across 23 manufacturing sites, including 12 US operations and three Kentucky locations. The company manufactures engine management systems, electric powertrains and integrated vehicle controls for major automakers. Ownership is currently split three ways: 40 percent Honda Motor Co., 40 percent Hitachi, Ltd., and 20 percent JIC Capital, with Honda in the process of acquiring an additional 21 percent stake from Hitachi to become majority owner and convert Astemo into a consolidated subsidiary. Because the company is privately held, it discloses no executive compensation.

Entry-level production work at the Berea plant pays roughly $15 to $19 an hour, according to worker-reported data and job postings, while skilled and engineering roles run considerably higher. Astemo does not directly hire its entire workforce for this pay: at least two staffing agencies, Nesco Resource and Staff Management-SMX, place workers on-site at the plant, an arrangement common across auto parts suppliers.

The day before Clouse’s death, Astemo hosted Kentucky Governor Beshear and local officials at the Berea plant to announce a $112 million expansion producing electric vehicle components. The project is described as the first phase of what is expected to become a $379 million investment.

“Kentucky continues to lead the way when it comes to advanced manufacturing and EV operations and this project represents another great company choosing to reinvest in the Commonwealth,” Beshear declared at the ceremony.

The expansion celebration is itself part of the corporate offensive surrounding the transition to electric vehicles, a restructuring that the auto bosses and their political allies in both parties are using to extract billions in public subsidies while driving down wages and conditions and eliminating jobs.

The Berea plant has no union but the UAW’s own record—including its complicity in the cover-up at Dundee, where it signed a contract co-managing lockout/tagout compliance while shielding itself from liability—demonstrates that a union bureaucracy tied to the corporations cannot protect workers’ lives.

In a recent visit to the Toledo, Ohio site where two workers, Heladio Perez, 46, and Mary Allen, 64, were killed at the Brent Industries plant on August 18, Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker running for president of the United Auto Workers, said the daily slaughter of workers was the product of “American capitalism.” He added:

> Every company puts profit before our lives. Over 5,000 workers die on the job every year in this country. Tens of thousands more die from disease caused by their work. Our workplaces are a slaughterhouse.
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> It doesn’t matter if the plant has a union, or is non-union, like Brent Industries. At the union plants, the company-union safety committees did nothing to stop deaths and injuries. They exist to give the illusion that workers have a voice. While management and union officials keep the line running. No matter the cost. Union or not—the result is the same. Workers pay with their lives.
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> The answer is workers organizing ourselves. Independent of the company. Independent of any union bureaucracy... Abolish the company-union safety committees. Replace them with rank-and-file safety committees. Run by workers, on every shop floor—union and non-union alike. Give workers full access to every record. Give workers the power to stop production when conditions are unsafe.

Workers at Astemo and throughout the auto parts industry must build their own independent rank-and-file committees, organized across plants and companies, to fight for safety, staffing and an end to speedup. Such committees cannot be subordinated to any union bureaucracy or to the Democratic and Republican parties, which celebrate deregulation and corporate “investment” while workers are killed on the job.