UPS worker Paul Roberts killed on the job 13 days before retirement

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Paul Roberts, a 63-year-old UPS worker with 44 years of service, was struck and killed by a company vehicle while on duty at the company's Customer Care Center in Earth City, Missouri, outside St. Louis, on the night of September 4. Roberts died at the scene. He was due to retire September 17, just 13 days later.

"He loved his job. Thirteen days from retiring, and he didn't get to do it," his sister, Donna Schraer, told KSDK. "It's sad he's not gonna get to celebrate and spend time and take it easy finally."

Roberts had worked at UPS since he was 18, beginning as a package handler and later working as a driver and tractor-trailer operator. He had married Barb, his partner of 37 years, only six months before his death. He leaves behind his wife, children and grandchildren.

The circumstances of Roberts's death emerged only piecemeal. Police initially reported that he had been struck by a vehicle at about 9:00 p.m. and that the driver remained at the scene and was cooperating with investigators. Later reporting established that Roberts was working at the time and that the vehicle belonged to UPS. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has opened an investigation.

Workers at the Earth City facility have already raised questions about the conditions under which Roberts was killed. KSDK reported that multiple UPS employees contacted the station about darkness at the facility that night and about continuing safety concerns there. OSHA records cited by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* show that two previous incidents at the facility resulted in amputations and that other workers have suffered heat-related injuries.

UPS has offered no public explanation of how one of its vehicles came to strike Roberts at his workplace. Its initial statement said only, "We're aware of a tragic situation in Earth City. Our heartfelt thoughts are with those involved and their family. We are referring any additional questions to authorities."

After workers raised concerns about conditions at the facility, the company answered by pointing to its safety program. "At UPS, we focus on the safety of our people every day," it said. "We train our people to prevent accidents and injuries and teach them how to stay healthy and safe." UPS said it has devoted more than 35 million hours and $2 billion to safety training over the last five years.

That response places the emphasis on training workers even as employees at Earth City are pointing to the physical conditions in which Roberts was killed. The issues requiring investigation include lighting, traffic patterns, separation of pedestrians from moving vehicles, staffing, work pace and what procedures were in force when the company vehicle struck him.

Teamsters Local 688, of which Roberts was a member, issued a statement expressing sympathy and saying it was "awaiting the results of the investigation." It added, "We are committed to ensuring that our members' safety is priority one when on the job." The local's public statement announced no independent investigation and no action by the union to establish what workers at the facility had reported before and after Roberts's death.

The Teamsters' national contract with UPS establishes joint Safety and Health Committees made up of bargaining unit and management representatives and calls for the union and UPS to work through a joint "Comprehensive Health and Safety Process." That labor-management framework did not prevent workers from reporting continuing hazards at Earth City, and after Roberts was killed Local 688 publicly deferred to outside investigators rather than opening an

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independent inquiry of its own.

Roberts is the latest in a series of UPS workers to die on the job.

In September 2025, 43-year-old UPS driver Shelma Reyna Guerrero, a mother of five, was killed while loading packages alone inside a cargo trailer at the company's facility in Richmond, California. Packages fell on her, and workers later reported that the extendable conveyor at the trailer had been malfunctioning. UPS restarted operations after roughly two hours while Guerrero's body remained in the trailer. "It was just business as usual," a worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*. "The lack of respect, compassion and empathy they showed her in death just killed me."

On July 24 of this year, another UPS worker was killed at the company's hub in Horsham, Pennsylvania, when he was pinned between a tractor-trailer and a loading dock. Coworkers reported being made to keep working as the incident unfolded. The worker's name was still not publicly released days later.

In May, Julio Valverde, a 35-year-old, 16-year UPS worker, collapsed and died at a facility in East Hempfield, Pennsylvania. As emergency personnel attempted to resuscitate him, supervisors instructed employees to continue working within feet of where he lay.

These deaths have occurred while UPS has accelerated a sweeping restructuring of its network and workforce. The company reported that it reduced its operational workforce by approximately 48,000 positions in 2025, including 15,000 fewer seasonal positions, and closed daily operations at 93 leased and owned buildings, 85 of them permanently. During the first half of 2026, it closed another 45 buildings, 44 permanently.

UPS reported $2.1 billion in adjusted operating profit for the second quarter of 2026 and expects to pay about $5.4 billion in dividends this year. It says its restructuring and "Efficiency Reimagined" programs are expected to produce roughly $3 billion in benefits in 2026.

The pressure to extract these savings bears directly on the conditions workers confront every day. Reductions in staffing, consolidation of work and the acceleration of production affect whether there is enough time, labor and control over the work process to operate safely.

The workers at Earth City who have spoken about darkness and other unsafe conditions possess knowledge that neither UPS's public relations statements nor the Teamsters' joint committees can substitute for. They must be able to bring forward what they know, protect coworkers who speak out and act collectively when conditions are unsafe. Preventing another death requires workers to organize independently of management and the union apparatus and use their own collective power over production.

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