

Workers respond to death of 15-year-old at Melbourne factory amid media silence

Our reporters
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More than two weeks have passed since the horrific death of a 15-year-old boy at a concrete factory in Melbourne's southeast. Despite the shocking circumstances, the death has received virtually no media coverage since the initial reports, while authorities have provided almost no further information.

The teenager was killed on September 24 at a precast concrete factory on Carter Way in Dandenong South. According to WorkSafe Victoria, he was fixing defects on a concrete panel when an adjacent panel weighing more than two tonnes fell onto him. Initial media reports indicated that the concrete panel had been standing upright before it fell.

Emergency services, including ambulances, police and firefighters, rushed to the factory at around 10:45 a.m. Paramedics attempted to save the boy, but he died at the scene.

That is virtually all that has been publicly established about the circumstances in which a child lost his life at work.

Why has the company operating the factory not been publicly identified by the authorities? What was a 15-year-old boy doing working with massive concrete panels weighing several tonnes? Was he employed as an apprentice, a casual worker or under some other arrangement? How long had he been working there?

What training had he received? Who was supervising him? What safety procedures were in place to prevent the collapse of the panels, and why did they fail? Were there previous safety incidents or complaints at the factory?

These are elementary questions that demand answers. Yet neither the company nor WorkSafe has provided a public explanation.

WorkSafe announced an investigation immediately after the death, the 34th workplace fatality recorded in Victoria at that time. But the announcement of an investigation cannot justify withholding basic information about the circumstances in which a child was killed.

The tragedy occurred in an area already identified by WorkSafe as a major workplace safety hotspot. In May, the regulator reported that seven manufacturing workplace deaths had occurred in postcode 3175 since 2021. Under its targeted Project 3175 program, inspectors had visited 225 workplaces and issued 272 improvement notices. Has the factory where the boy died been inspected under this program, and were any hazards identified?

The consequences of the silence were apparent. *World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke with workers and residents in Hampton Park, near Dandenong South, on October 3.

Several had not heard about the boy's death, despite living or working only a short distance from the factory. When informed by reporters, they expressed sympathy for his family and concern about workplace safety.

Mohsen, a painter with a young family, was among those who had not heard about the tragedy.

"I'm sad. It's very hard for his family, for everyone, for me," he said. "Safety must be put first."

Asked about a 15-year-old working in a factory, he replied: "This age is too early for work. He needs to study and go to the gym, not work. Work is too early for this age."

Mohsen called for greater government support and educational opportunities for young people so they would not be compelled to undertake dangerous work.

Shafiq, 36, who runs a plumbing business, said: "I'm really sorry for the parents, for the community. It's not good... to be honest, everyone should be very upset about these things."

"As a community, we have to do something, to find a solution. Maybe next time we'll have the same case. It's better to provide safety for everyone, for every worker."

Asked about the responsibility of the unions and the Labor Party, Shafiq pointed to Labor's control of the state and federal governments: "They are in charge in Victoria and federally. They have to provide safety."

Muhammad, an Uber driver and former painter, said safety standards varied considerably between construction sites.

"The union who appears on all these construction work sites, they must concentrate on all the safety issues," he said. "This would be good for every worker and every human."

The workers also connected workplace safety to the broader pressures confronting working people, including the cost-of-living crisis and the diversion of vast resources into war.

Shafiq said that for those on low incomes, "it's going to be hard to survive." On the wars in the Middle East, he added: "We need peace in the world. What's going on in Palestine, in Iran, Middle East, in these countries, is horrible."

Muhammad argued that governments should prioritise workers' lives over military expenditure.

“Instead of putting the money on military, they must put it for the human beings’ life. For the safety, whatever the work is,” he said. “They must care about worker’s salary. They must care about his healthcare, health, everything.”

Describing the financial pressures facing workers, he said: “I’m working just for my electricity bill, just to survive.”

He concluded: “The workers must unite for their rights. All over the world. Then something will happen. Otherwise, nothing.”

Nazim, who runs a small retail business, had also not heard about the teenager’s death. He pointed to the Australian government’s expenditure of more than “\$365 billion on submarines that people don’t need,” contrasting military spending with the needs of ordinary people.

“The flow of wealth is towards fewer hands. The majority of people are having problems.”

He argued that an alternative to capitalism was needed. “The US capitalist system controls the whole world and is destroying the world because war is a business.”

Nazim was also critical of the trade unions, saying they were “controlled by very few for their own interests.”

He stressed the importance of genuine collective struggle: “To join hands with working people and to change the system. Without organisation you can’t do much.”

The interviews revealed a sharp contrast between the silence surrounding the teenager’s death and the immediate concern expressed by workers who had not even heard about it.

The death is part of a broader pattern of horrific accidents involving young and inexperienced workers.

Less than ten months earlier, on December 1, 2025, 15-year-old Beau Bradford suffered fatal injuries while working at a construction site in Surfers Paradise, Queensland after being struck by a falling object.

In February, WorkSafe Victoria revealed that more than 3,000 injury claims involving apprentices had been accepted in the state since the beginning of 2021. These included 410 claims involving falls from heights, with injuries from such incidents including fractured skulls, traumatic brain injuries and spinal damage.

Over the preceding five years, WorkSafe had prosecuted 66 companies for safety breaches involving apprentices, including nine prosecutions relating to five fatal incidents.

In 2016, a 17-year-old apprentice plumber, just 18 days into his employment, suffered two collapsed lungs, 12 broken ribs and other serious injuries when an excavation collapsed on him at a Melbourne construction site.

In October 2023, a 17-year-old first-year apprentice suffered extensive burns when his clothing caught fire during welding work at a factory in Kyabram. He spent a month in hospital and underwent multiple operations and skin grafts. His employer was subsequently fined \$30,000 for failing to provide adequate safety measures and supervision.

Young workers face particular dangers because of their

inexperience, dependence on employers and limited ability to challenge unsafe conditions. Yet Victoria’s specific child-employment restrictions largely cease to apply once a teenager turns 15. At that age, young people can legally enter industries and workplaces from which 14-year-olds are excluded, subject to general workplace safety and other legal requirements.

These figures expose the scale of the dangers confronting young workers. They also raise fundamental questions about the organisations that claim to defend workers’ safety.

Was the factory unionised? Were officials aware of conditions at the site? Have they sought to establish what happened or demanded that the company and WorkSafe release the facts?

More than two weeks after the tragedy, no public statement from a trade union demanding answers about how a 15-year-old came to be killed at work has been identified. Regardless of whether the factory was unionised, this silence exposes the indifference of the union bureaucracies to the plight of vulnerable young workers—in this case, a child of just 15.

The silence of the unions is particularly revealing given their routine claims to be guardians of workplace safety. In practice, these organisations collaborate with employers and successive Labor governments in maintaining a system in which management retains control over production and workers’ lives are subordinated to profit.

The contrast between the official silence and the immediate concern expressed by workers in Hampton Park underscores the need for workers to take matters into their own hands. They have every right to know how and why this tragedy occurred, whether basic safety requirements were met and what is being done to prevent another death.

Independent rank-and-file safety committees, democratically controlled by workers themselves, must be established in factories, construction sites and other workplaces. They must have the authority to investigate dangerous conditions, demand full disclosure of safety information and halt unsafe work.

Such a struggle must be connected to the fight for a socialist political alternative that places the lives and needs of working people, rather than corporate profits and militarism, at the centre of society.



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