

“Our lives don't matter to Ford”: Tragic COVID-19 death of young contract worker covered up by management and the UAW

By Shannon Jones
14 August 2020

The recent tragic death of a young Detroit-area Ford contract worker from COVID-19 illustrates how Ford management and the United Auto Workers are withholding information vital for health and safety.

Alberto Alturo Alvarado, age 33, died July 22 from complications related to COVID-19, his family reported. The young worker, employed by contracting firm DFM Solutions had recently gone to work at the Ford Van Dyke transmission plant in the north Detroit suburb of Sterling Heights. The plant supplies the Ford Explorer, Escape and other models. The plant currently employs about 1,000 hourly workers, down from nearly 2,000 several years ago.

A source told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* that Arturo had been involved in temperature checks of plant employees. It is not known what was the extent of his contact with other workers. The death was never reported to plant employees, who only learned of the death via Facebook posts from family members, who have set up a Go-Fund-Me page to cover funeral costs.

Alberto Alturo Alvarado leaves behind his wife Heather, also a Ford worker; and two children, Isabella and AJ, ages five and six years respectively. Both Heather and AJ have tested positive for COVID-19 and were in quarantine. They are now apparently free of the virus.

In a July 9 Facebook post, Alberto expressed excitement at being hired by DFM. “Tomorrow I start my new venture with DFM. Maybe I'll like it. Maybe its something I'll stick with.

But this will forever be my dream. I don't care if it takes me 40 years to get one. I'm gonna get it.”

The death of this young worker in the prime of life is

the brutal and inevitable product of the back to work drive by the auto companies supported by both political parties and the UAW. Since the start of the pandemic the central focus of the corporate establishment has been to defend profits and prop up Wall Street whatever the cost in human lives. The cover-up of this death reflects the fear of the growing resistance in the auto plants to the unsafe conditions that workers are being subjected.

Since the reopening of auto plants in May, corporate management at all the major carmakers have tried to limit information about COVID-19 infections, refusing to disclose the numbers and locations of new cases. During this period Ford and other automakers have not acknowledged any deaths from COVID-19 at their North American factories. Through May 8 Ford had acknowledged 11 COVID-19 related deaths. That there have been no further fatalities defies credibility given the rapid spread of the virus in many states. The death of Alberto Alturo Alvarez is the first recent death that the *Autoworker Newsletter* has been able to confirm, but there are likely many others.

This criminal policy of cover-up underscores the urgency of the call by the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* and the Socialist Equality Party for the formation of rank-and-file-safety committees to break through the cover-up being carried out by auto company management and their UAW stooges.

Meanwhile, Ford CEO Bill Hackett has announced that the company will extend its work-from-home policy for select white-collar employees until the end of 2020. “It's my bet it will be extended beyond that,” he told reporters this week. “If you come this far to manage this and just say 'Well I'm tired of this' and

change the profile and the risk, why did we do all the safety planning to begin with?"

He then added, that Ford owner "Bill [Ford] and I feel the company's running really well right now the way we're all working it," he said. "So we don't want to prematurely get back."

These frank remarks expose the utter hypocrisy of the automakers, who claim that it is safe for plant workers to resume full production, often shoulder to shoulder, while keeping salaried personnel working from home due to safety concerns.

A worker who wished to remain anonymous told the *Autoworker Newsletter* that there are many cases at the plant that are not being reported. Referring to the death of Alfredo, the worker said,

"They are telling us it wasn't COVID. They are not telling us the truth. I feel as though our lives do not matter at Ford Motor Company."

The worker spoke of the ongoing revelations of massive corruption in the UAW involving bribery and kickbacks. "In every one of these plants people have been put in place to keep this [UAW] corruption going. It's all set up. It's always been corrupt. Now it's 150 times worse.

"With the union against us, what rights do we have at this point?"

Another worker pointed to the largely bogus safety protocols. "Rumor has it another person was taken out yesterday on day shift for a positive COVID case. Again, unconfirmed and only a rumor as of now."

A portion of the Van Dyke transmission plant has been converted to the production of face masks for Ford Employees. The line produces millions of face masks with equipment and material brought from Ford facilities in China.

Workers report that safety protocols are not adhered to. Only four people at a time are supposed to be in locker room in the face mask department to change into protective gear, however, this requirement is never enforced. Furthermore, these workers are required to get dressed and undressed before and after their breaks, meaning their break time is effectively reduced by at least 10 minutes.

In recent days, workers at the Ford Chicago Assembly Plant and Ford Dearborn Truck plant have launched rank-and-file safety committees to oppose the UAW management cover-up of COVID-19 infections

and deaths and fight for real protections for workers. These committees insist that all workers have the right to vital information necessary to protect their lives and those of loved ones and coworkers. This includes complete and timely information of any cases of COVID-19 and what areas have been affected.

We encourage workers who are interested in joining this fight or want more information to contact the *Autoworker Newsletter*.

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>