

Ford Kansas City Assembly workers launch Rank-and-File Safety Committee to save lives

By the Ford Kansas City Assembly Rank-and-File Safety Committee
19 September 2020

The World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter is assisting workers in organizing a network of rank-and-file safety committees to fight for safe working conditions and to stop the spread of the pandemic. To join the Ford Kansas City Rank-and-File Safety Committee or for help in starting a committee at another plant, contact us today.

We, the rank-and-file workers at Ford Kansas City Assembly Plant, are faced with a life-and-death situation each day we walk through the plant gates. Ford management and the United Auto Workers union are allowing the coronavirus to tear through the plant unchecked. They are hiding the true number of cases from workers, even though we see our fellow workers getting sick, and some have tragically died.

COVID-19 is very serious. Recent studies have shown that it spreads through aerosolized particles. It can spread through the air up to 16 feet. In cooler temperatures, the virus lasts on surfaces much longer. People who have preexisting conditions like asthma, diabetes and obesity are at higher risk for severe infection. This virus kills.

Coronavirus cases are going up in the state of Missouri and they show no signs of slowing down. The state reported record numbers of hospitalizations in the past week. Yet the Democrats and Republicans in the state legislature are allowing non-essential businesses like Ford to operate.

Neither the UAW nor Ford has addressed any of the safety issues inside the plant since production restarted in May. The union worked with management to implement bogus safety protocols which they either don't follow or don't work. Symptom questionnaires and temperature checks are not sufficient, and we know that these measures do not rule out asymptomatic cases.

There is no way to socially distance in the plant with

about 9,000 workers across three shifts. The masks provided by Ford are uncomfortable. The heat in the summer made it so difficult to breathe that some of us passed out on the lines.

Health and safety problems that existed before have gotten worse. We are still crowding into bathrooms on breaks, which are filthy. Trash bins on the floor are overflowing and raccoons get into them. We are not given enough time to clean our workstations, and the highly exploited cleaning contract workers are not given the time or tools to clean sufficiently.

Many of our fellow workers have stayed home out of legitimate concern for their health and the health of their families. Ford has hired thousands of temp workers to keep production running. They're paid poverty wages, they have no job protections, and the company fires them left and right. The UAW turns a blind eye to the abuse, just like they do to our health.

Workers are getting sick on the line, and does the company or union shut down the plant for cleaning like they said they would? No! They force us to keep the lines running in dangerous conditions to produce profits.

We know that the UAW will not stand up for us. We know that the Democrats and Republicans will only continue to do what the corporations want. That is why we, the rank-and-file workers at Ford Kansas City Assembly plant, are taking matters into our own hands to organize the fight for our right to a safe and comfortable workplace.

We put forth the following demands:

1. All workers must be notified of any cases of COVID-19 and what areas have been affected. The companies must keep a total count of positive

and potential COVID-19 cases, updated in real time, that is available to all workers. This information must not be kept hidden from us.

2. When cases are confirmed, the factory should be closed for at least 24 hours for deep cleaning, not just the affected area, but the whole plant. Preventative maintenance and daily sanitizing is vital to ensure a safe and comfortable working environment.

3. All areas of the plant must be sanitized regularly and all equipment must be cleaned on breaks by a designated cleaning crew trained in the proper procedures. The areas of the plant where we work must be properly ventilated and cooled for our safety.

4. Social distancing must be implemented at all times—when entering and leaving the plant and during bathroom, lunch and other break times. Disinfectant and cleaning equipment must remain readily available and stocked for workers to use as they see fit.

5. Each worker in the plant must have the highest-quality personal protective equipment (PPE) to wear. We demand all lines be stopped for at least 10 minutes every hour for workers to take off their masks, stay hydrated and cool down.

6. We must have access to universal daily testing with rapid results and the highest-quality health care if either one of us or our family members becomes ill, all paid for by Ford. Daily, high quality testing in addition to contact tracing are the only ways proven to effectively control the spread of the pandemic.

7. Workers who feel ill, who need to take medical leave or who have to quarantine must receive full pay and not be penalized for staying home.

8. We will not accept that workers face any retaliation in the form of write-ups, harassment, layoffs or other types of intimidation for workers who blow the whistle or speak out on safety conditions and other violations of our rights.

9. Stop misusing and abusing temp workers to fill in production shifts when regularly scheduled workers stay home for their own health and safety. All workers in the plant deserve the right to a safe and comfortable workplace and the best health

care possible. All workers must receive adequate paid time off benefits regardless of full-time or part-time status or seniority.

10. The violation of our working hours and schedules must stop now. We cannot stay healthy if we are constantly sleep-deprived. We demand a return to a fully paid eight-hour day, with adequate breaks, with at least two days off per week for rest and leisure.

11. Whenever conditions are not safe, we have the right to collectively refuse to work without any threat of retaliation by management or the union. Our health and lives are far more important than Ford's profits.

If you work at KCAP and agree to these demands, join our safety committee! We, the workers, are the only ones who can fight for our safety. We must form a rank-and-file safety committee to join together all workers in the plant, full-time, temporary, contract workers, across shifts and departments to fight for our common interests.

If you work at another plant, we urge you to form a rank-and-file safety committee to link up with ours. This is our fight, the working class is the only force that will stop the virus and save lives worldwide!

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>