

Baltimore sanitation worker dies from overheating on the job

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Baltimore garbage collection worker Ronald Silver II died last Friday while working under extremely unsafe heat conditions.

The mid-Atlantic region of the United States has been suffering through a series of intense heat waves throughout the summer. The Friday that Silver died, the city of Baltimore had been placed under a Code Red Extreme Heat Alert as temperatures reached 105 degrees Fahrenheit.

Sharp pains plagued Silver throughout the day. The route through Barclay neighborhood where he worked often required that he work without air conditioning, water, nor breaks. Department of Public Works (DPW) management ignored concerns and pleas related to the heat, a practice that some in the workforce had become dangerously used to. One of Silver's coworkers was quoted as saying, "he thought he was just being lazy and didn't want to work."

Late in the afternoon, Silver, now in a heat-induced sickness, knocked on the nearest home, asking for some water. Gabrielle Avendano gave him some and doused him with it to shake him out of his symptoms. Silver then collapsed and stopped breathing, prompting Avendano to administer first aid and call 911. Silver would be rushed to the nearest hospital and was pronounced dead, the result of "overheating of the body."

According to news reports, Avendano had believed Silver's coworker was calling 911 to seek help for the distressed man. The *Banner* notes that Avendano and another neighbor who had witnessed the incident "observed Silver's coworker in the truck on his phone. They claim to have learned afterwards the coworker was talking to a DPW supervisor and not emergency services, like they assumed."

Avendano decried the failure of DPW to save this

man's life: "I'm shocked and so sad that he died because I think it could have been prevented if they had just called 911 sooner in the day. He had been complaining for most of the day about the pain that he was in, and nobody called for help except for me."

The Democratic mayor of the city Brandon Scott and DPW immediately went into damage control, giving phony "heartfelt" condolences which scrupulously avoided any assignment of blame to the city and management. "Our hearts are first and foremost with him, his family and loved ones, and his DPW colleagues as we grapple with this loss," the city declared in a joint statement of the mayor's office and sanitation department.

In fact, a report last month by the city Inspector General singled out the Cherry Hill location where Silver worked out of as an egregious offender of worker heat safety. A July 10 detailed inhospitable working conditions ranging from "broken air conditioning, inoperable water fountains and nonfunctional ice machines...[which] violate federal laws around safe work conditions, specifically one that requires employers to provide potable drinking water to workers."

Scott's response at that time was to grandstand. Admitting first that the city's sanitation department endured "zero, zilch, nada investment" for decades, Scott promised his administration would be different. "What you'll never get from me is a stopgap," the mayor declared. "You'll never get a 'we're going to do this now and pass the buck.' We're going to pull the band aid off and actually build the facilities that our workers deserve and not just consistently patch up buildings that are long past their life cycle."

In fact, calling the city's response a "bandaid" would be an overstatement. On Tuesday, DPW employees

were called into a mandatory “heat safety” seminar as a part of the city’s face-saving effort and attempt to pin the blame for the death on coworkers.

According to a July 16 report in the *Banner* on the inspector general’s follow up visit, regulators “found that garbage crews had left for their routes without being given Gatorade or water. It wasn’t until a supervisor saw Cumming that they began filling up a trash bucket with ice and putting out drinks.” The temperature that day was 104 degrees.

Last Tuesday, Democratic governor Wes Moore weighed in to preempt rising anger at the horrendous conditions under which government employees are laboring in. He called for a “full investigation” and wants public employees “to know that their safety is going to be of the highest priority.”

Patrick Moran, the president of AFSCME Maryland, sought to grandstand over the workplace tragedy which his union had allowed to happen. “The toxic culture at DPW must be gutted,” he declared at a press conference. “If it’s your management style, then you need to leave or we will help you leave the city,” he cried, pompously. In fact, AFSCME had endorsed Scott’s reelection last March, as it had also done with its previous Democratic Party mayors.

Whatever “investigation” is launched by the city will attempt to whitewash the criminal role played by DPW and the local and state government in alliance with leaders in AFSCME Council 3 and the bureaucratic apparatus of the unions.

Mayor Scott sought to downplay the non-use of air conditioning, saying that the relentless heatwave had exhausted the infrastructure. While partly true, the general state of infrastructure in Baltimore is not the product of climate change. Recent catastrophes such as the avoidable collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, have demonstrated the crumbling state of the city’s infrastructure.

Disinvestment in the state and city will only continue with Governor Moore’s recent state budget, passed last month. The budget included cuts of nearly \$150 million to government spending. Some of the cuts include: Department of Natural Resources: \$2.1 million; Department of Agriculture: \$2.7 million; Department of Information Technology: \$15.6 million; Maryland Higher Education Commission: \$28.5 million.

Moore, a former investment banker, announced the

cuts through an op-ed in the while attending the *Baltimore Sun* Valley Conference in Idaho, known colloquially as the “billionaire’s summer camp.”

According to the Maryland Department of Health, 9 people died in 2023. In the most up-to-date records available, Silver would make the tenth person in 2024 to die, surpassing the official number last year. So far this year, 762 heat-related visits to the emergency room have been recorded by all state health departments. According to an Associated Press analysis of Center for Disease Control and Prevention data, over 2,300 people who died in 2023 listed the “effects of excessive heat” as a primary concern.

In a report by the Environmental Protection Agency, an average of 34 workers died per year from 1992 to 2022, for a total of 986. This is most likely an undercount. Outdoor workers face the brunt of extreme weather. Construction workers accounted for a little over a third of deaths, totaling 334, yet only comprise six percent of the workforce.



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