

4 workers exposed to toxic hexavalent chromium at Tesla Gigafactory in Austin, Texas

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Tesla was fined twice for a total of \$7,000 by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration for exposing four workers to hexavalent chromium without proper training or monitoring at its Gigafactory near Austin, Texas. The amount was negotiated down from \$13,000 by the company.

The first fine was for not providing effective training or information on hexavalent chromium on and before July 5 of this year. Tesla was also found to not be tracking 8-hour exposure to the chemical on and before June 25. The workers cleaning up the chemical at an industrial laser were found to have received no prior training or information, in addition to not being assessed for chromium exposure.

Hexavalent chromium is used for corrosion resistance and in metal finishing and chrome plating, as well as the production of steel and other alloys, in addition to other applications.

For the workers exposed, the effects could be nothing short of devastating. Hexavalent chromium is a known cancer-causing chemical, recognized by the International Agency for Research on Cancer as a Group I occupational carcinogen. It causes lung cancer, cancer of the nasal cavity and paranasal sinuses. It can also cause stomach and gastrointestinal cancers when ingested through drinking water.

Other such incidents involving hexavalent chromium include the poisoning of Hinckley, California by PG&E which was the subject of the film *Erin Brockovich*.

OSHA notes that it can also cause occupational asthma, perforated eardrums, eye irritation and permanent eye damage, kidney damage, liver damage, pulmonary congestion and edema, upper abdominal pain, nose irritation and damage, skin irritation, as well

as erosion and discoloration of the teeth. It can also lead to long-lasting and severe contact dermatitis and skin ulcers, sometimes referred to as “chrome ulcers.”

The \$7,000 fine is less than pocket change for Tesla’s fascist CEO Elon Musk, with a net worth of \$334 billion. He “makes” by some estimates the same amount as the fine in one minute, with other estimates putting it closer to 10 seconds. Tesla itself pulled in \$15 billion in profit for 2024.

Musk is a major figure in the incoming Trump administration, and will seek to extend the brutal workplace conditions that exist in his factories to ever greater numbers of the working class. Musk will be the co-chair of the “Department of Governmental Efficiency,” whose publicly stated aim is to cut \$2 trillion *a year* from the federal budget, with regulatory bodies cited as a major priority.

Tesla’s operations serve as the basis for massive financial speculation, with the company worth \$1.12 trillion, by far the most of any auto company, despite the fact that it ranks eighth in US market share. But while it is a boondoggle for Wall Street investors, Tesla is infamous for high-tech exploitation of its workers.

As one worker told the WSWS, “most workers are usually always forced to do work ‘ASAP,’” leading to injuries.

For 2023, one out of every 13 workers was injured at the Austin plant according to OSHA’s ITA Summary Data. This made it the ninth most accident-prone plant in America out of 385,000 tracked by the data, with one of the eight ahead of it another Tesla plant in California.

Two workers have died working at the site. Antelmo Ramirez died of heat stroke while constructing the

plant in 2021. Victor Joe Gomez Sr. died as a result of being electrocuted on August 1 of this year while servicing an electrical panel, causing him to go into cardiac arrest. He was later pronounced dead at the hospital.

Gomez's family launched a lawsuit against the company for wrongful death. To date, OSHA has released little on Gomez's death, with the investigation expected to take at least six months.

Both deaths were social murder. The company forces workers to speed up their work, elevating the risk of injury and death, and either does not enforce safety practices, or does not have safety practices set up in the first place. These deaths were caused by known risks being ignored by management to produce more profits.



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