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Wempco's machine smashes worker's head during production

JULY 1, 2015 : AFEEZ HANAFI ■ 8 COMMENTS

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Ogunkoya (inset: The machine)

Samuel Ogunkoya, a 26-year-old worker of Wempco Steel Mill Company, Magboro, Ogun State, has been killed after one of the pipes affixed to the company's 'actrus pumping machine' fell and smashed his head.

It was learnt that the vehicle, which housed the machine, had developed a mechanical fault about a month before the incident. Some workers were said to have reported the fault, but the management allegedly told them to "manage it like that."

PUNCH Metro gathered that the vehicle was eventually taken to a mechanic's shop on Friday for repair and was returned to the

company on Monday by the mechanic.

The machine was being used to mold concrete bricks when one of the steel pipes of the machine fell and landed on Ogunkoya's head.

Our correspondent was told that the deceased, who hailed from the Ijebu-Igbo area of the state, wanted to pick the charger for the remote control of the vehicle when the pipe smashed his head. He was said to have been rushed to a hospital in the community, where he was referred to the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital, Ikeja. He was reportedly confirmed 'Dead on Arrival.'

Some of the deceased's colleagues, who spoke with PUNCH Metro on condition of anonymity for fear of losing their jobs, blamed the company for Ogunkoya's death.

They said three other workers, identified only as Jimoh, Samuel and Ibrahim, had died earlier in the year as a result of the management's indifference to workers' welfare.

One of them, who witnessed the incident, said the "hydraulic system" of the vehicle was long overdue for a replacement.

He said, "For almost a month now, the vehicle was releasing hydraulic oil. One of us complained to the management, but they said there was no time; they said we should manage it like that. We complained that the vehicle was not working well, but they said, 'go and manage it or leave the job.'

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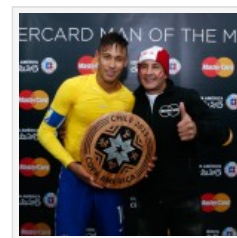


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"It was taken to a mechanic last Friday and was brought back on Monday. It was not tested before the production commenced. The machine has five pipes used for molding concrete. A worker and the mechanic were operating the vehicle. Four pipes had come. The fifth one was coming out when it suddenly fell and smashed his head as he bent down to pick the charger."

Another worker lamented the working conditions in the company.

"I have been working in this company for over five years. There is no welfare for the workers. Ogunkoya is the fourth worker we have lost to the company's negligence this year after Jimoh, Samuel and Ibrahim. It was a forklift machine that smashed Jimoh's body. He was passing by; unknown to him, a machine was being operated from the inside. The forklift pinned him to the floor. He died on the way to the hospital.

"There should be a hospital inside the company, where casualties can be rushed to, but the management are only interested in using us to make money," he said.

A father of two, who also works for Wempco, said they were not only poorly paid, but were also subjected to dehumanising conditions. He said Ibrahim was electrocuted.

He said, "After we finished production sometime in March, Ibrahim was bathing on an iron sheet laid across the drain when a wire that passed through the place electrocuted him. He died on the spot. There is no bathroom for us in the company; no toilet. We excrete inside the bush. This is my seventh year in the company, yet I am still a casual worker. They pay us N15,000 every two weeks. If we have issues with our bosses, they may deduct N2,000 or N5,000 from our wages. We resume work at 7am and close at 7pm."

Another employee said they kept mum on the wages to avoid being sacked. "If they know we spoke with PUNCH, we are gone," he added.

One of the managers of the company, Mr. Abdulganiyu Abdulazeez, said the incident was blown out of proportion, adding that some workers were not safety-conscious.

He said, "There is no much response that I can give now. When anything happens, people exaggerate the information. That is what they (workers) are trying to do. As a citizen, I am there to protect the interest of Nigerian.

"When we see, I will tell you the true picture of things. In every organisation, accidents are bound to happen. Some of these workers don't use their safety devices."

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