# Safety concerns and retaliatory firings shadow BlueOval SK Battery Park's electric vehicle promise



# Concerns Unveiled: Safety Issues at BlueOval SK Battery Park

In a significant development for Kentucky's burgeoning electric vehicle industry, the BlueOval SK Battery Park, a joint venture between Ford Motor Co. and SK On, has come under scrutiny following alarming safety reports from workers. The $5.8 billion facility, designed to produce electric vehicle batteries, is hailed as a major economic project for Hardin County, promising to create 5,000 jobs. However, a multitude of safety concerns has emerged, threatening not just employee welfare but also the project's ambitious goals.

Amanda Johnson, the inaugural production supervisor at BlueOval SK, has articulated her dismay over the safety issues plaguing the facility. Describing the role as an “answered prayer” for a single mother seeking financial security, Johnson says her experience soured significantly after she was terminated in January 2024. She believes her dismissal was a retaliatory response to her advocacy for improved safety measures and her vocal opposition to management's anti-union stance. Presently navigating legal channels, including the National Labor Relations Board and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Johnson is primarily concerned about the safety of her former colleagues, many of whom continue to report hazardous working conditions.

Investigations have revealed that employees at BlueOval SK have filed numerous complaints related to workplace safety, prompting the Kentucky labor department to open multiple inquiries into the plant’s operations. Reports from the Courier Journal reveal serious shortfalls including inadequate emergency procedures, persistent mold contamination, and instances of respiratory illnesses among personnel. Concerns about mishandling hazardous chemicals like n-Methylpyrrolidone (NMP), linked to severe health risks, have been raised repeatedly over fear of toxic exposure leading to long-term health ramifications.

The environmental oversight is compounded by revelations of a bat-infested training facility and blocked emergency exit doors, which further exacerbate the potential for workplace injuries. Such violations echo similar safety lapses observed at another SK facility, where OSHA recently fined SK Battery America over $77,000 for serious safety infractions. These included deficiencies in employee training for emergencies and inadequate protective measures against hazardous substances.

While BlueOval SK vehemently denies these claims, asserting adherence to stringent safety regulations and procedures, the testimonies of employees paint a different picture. Workers have described an atmosphere where fear of retaliation deters them from reporting hazards. One employee, wanting to remain anonymous, expressed hesitance to raise concerns over unsafe conditions, stating, “If you want to stay employed, you do what you're told.”

The Kentucky Education and Labor Cabinet, responding to the growing list of complaints, has mentioned that the scale of the project naturally entails an array of occupational health and safety challenges. Governor Andy Beshear has publicly praised the project, positioning it as a key driver for employment and economic growth in the state. Despite this optimism, ongoing investigations and reported illnesses among the workforce present a stark contrast to the projected benefits.

A segment of the workforce’s sentiment mirrors a growing frustration; many feel the promising prospect of participating in the “electric vehicle revolution” has been overshadowed by health concerns and inadequate safety measures. Employees like Bill Wilmoth, who works in formation production, have felt the initial excitement of a new industry quickly diminish amidst rising health issues. Wilmoth reported respiratory problems that he attributes to mold exposure in the plant, reflecting broader fears shared by his colleagues.

Evidently, unresolved issues surrounding safety at BlueOval SK raise critical questions not only about worker wellbeing but also about the broader implications for the electric vehicle sector in Kentucky. The juxtaposition of economic aspiration and potential workplace hazards illustrates the complexity of rapidly advancing new industries where oversight and employee safety must go hand in hand.

As efforts to unionise gain momentum among the workers, bolstered by escalating safety concerns, the future of BlueOval SK hangs in the balance. The looming question remains: Will the prospect of union representation drive meaningful changes that prioritise health and safety, or will it be overshadowed by economic imperatives? In a state that has staked much on the success of electric vehicles, the ability to reconciliate employee rights with corporate objectives will be essential in crafting a sustainable future for all involved.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://eu.courier-journal.com/story/money/companies/2025/05/07/ford-sk-on-battery-plant-kentucky-workers-health-safety-concerns/77552668007/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://eu.courier-journal.com/story/money/companies/2025/05/07/ford-sk-on-battery-plant-kentucky-workers-health-safety-concerns/77552668007/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://eu.courier-journal.com/story/money/companies/2025/05/07/ford-sk-on-battery-plant-kentucky-workers-health-safety-concerns/77552668007/), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-says-sk-battery-faces-77200-fines-over-employee-health-hazards-2024-04-08/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://eu.courier-journal.com/story/money/companies/2025/05/07/ford-sk-on-battery-plant-kentucky-workers-health-safety-concerns/77552668007/), [[3]](https://www.osha.gov/news/newsreleases/region4/01172024)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://eu.courier-journal.com/story/money/companies/2025/05/07/ford-sk-on-battery-plant-kentucky-workers-health-safety-concerns/77552668007/), [[4]](https://www.labornotes.org/2024/02/fords-battery-flagship-socked-mold-sickness-workers-say)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://eu.courier-journal.com/story/money/companies/2025/05/07/ford-sk-on-battery-plant-kentucky-workers-health-safety-concerns/77552668007/), [[6]](https://workcompgeorgia.com/sk-battery/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://eu.courier-journal.com/story/money/companies/2025/05/07/ford-sk-on-battery-plant-kentucky-workers-health-safety-concerns/77552668007/), [[5]](https://fordauthority.com/2024/02/ford-blueoval-sk-ceo-says-mold-situation-is-being-handled/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://eu.courier-journal.com/story/money/companies/2025/05/07/ford-sk-on-battery-plant-kentucky-workers-health-safety-concerns/77552668007/)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://eu.courier-journal.com/story/money/companies/2025/05/07/ford-sk-on-battery-plant-kentucky-workers-health-safety-concerns/77552668007/), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-says-sk-battery-faces-77200-fines-over-employee-health-hazards-2024-04-08/), [[6]](https://workcompgeorgia.com/sk-battery/)
* Paragraph 10 – [[1]](https://eu.courier-journal.com/story/money/companies/2025/05/07/ford-sk-on-battery-plant-kentucky-workers-health-safety-concerns/77552668007/), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-says-sk-battery-faces-77200-fines-over-employee-health-hazards-2024-04-08/)
* Paragraph 11 – [[1]](https://eu.courier-journal.com/story/money/companies/2025/05/07/ford-sk-on-battery-plant-kentucky-workers-health-safety-concerns/77552668007/)
* Paragraph 12 – [[1]](https://eu.courier-journal.com/story/money/companies/2025/05/07/ford-sk-on-battery-plant-kentucky-workers-health-safety-concerns/77552668007/), [[3]](https://www.osha.gov/news/newsreleases/region4/01172024)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://eu.courier-journal.com/story/money/companies/2025/05/07/ford-sk-on-battery-plant-kentucky-workers-health-safety-concerns/77552668007/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-says-sk-battery-faces-77200-fines-over-employee-health-hazards-2024-04-08/> - In April 2024, the U.S. Labor Department announced that SK Battery America faced $77,200 in fines for five serious safety violations following a lithium battery fire in October 2023 at its Georgia plant. The violations included inadequate employee training on protecting against toxic atmospheres and improper emergency response planning. This was the company's second violation notice in recent months, with previous fines of $75,000 in January for exposing employees to unsafe levels of nickel and other metals. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-says-sk-battery-faces-77200-fines-over-employee-health-hazards-2024-04-08/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.osha.gov/news/newsreleases/region4/01172024> - In January 2024, the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) cited SK Battery America Inc. for six serious violations at its Commerce, Georgia plant. The violations included exposing employees to continuous noise levels exceeding the permissible limit, failing to provide adequate respiratory protection for workers handling hazardous materials, and not ensuring access to eyewash stations and emergency showers for those working with corrosive materials. OSHA proposed penalties totaling $75,449. ([osha.gov](https://www.osha.gov/news/newsreleases/region4/01172024?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.labornotes.org/2024/02/fords-battery-flagship-socked-mold-sickness-workers-say> - In February 2024, workers at the BlueOval SK Battery Park in Glendale, Kentucky, reported health issues due to mold contamination. The mold was found on shipping crates containing factory equipment, leading to respiratory illnesses among workers. Despite these concerns, management continued operations, prompting investigations by the Kentucky Education and Labor Cabinet. The situation highlighted the challenges in balancing rapid construction with worker safety. ([labornotes.org](https://labornotes.org/2024/02/fords-battery-flagship-socked-mold-sickness-workers-say?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://fordauthority.com/2024/02/ford-blueoval-sk-ceo-says-mold-situation-is-being-handled/> - In February 2024, Michael Adams, CEO of Ford BlueOval SK, addressed concerns about mold contamination at the BlueOval SK Battery Park in Kentucky. He acknowledged the issue and stated that the safety of all employees was paramount, assuring that the situation was being managed appropriately. The mold was discovered in shipping crates containing factory equipment, leading to respiratory issues among workers. ([fordauthority.com](https://fordauthority.com/2024/02/ford-blueoval-sk-ceo-says-mold-situation-is-being-handled/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://workcompgeorgia.com/sk-battery/> - A 2024 article by Gearhart Law Group highlighted safety concerns at SK Battery America, including poor communication, inadequate training, and exposure to hazardous materials. Employees reported long 12-hour shifts in environments with excessive carbon particulates, graphite, and nitrogen gas. The article emphasized the lack of adherence to OSHA safety standards and the prevalence of workplace accidents, urging workers to claim compensation benefits following injuries. ([workcompgeorgia.com](https://workcompgeorgia.com/sk-battery/?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.osha.gov/news/newsreleases/region4/03062019-0> - In March 2019, the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) cited U.S. Battery Manufacturing Co. in Augusta, Georgia, for exposing employees to lead and other safety hazards. The company faced penalties of $115,594 for failing to implement proper safety measures, including inadequate training and medical surveillance programs. Elevated lead levels can cause debilitating and permanent health issues. ([osha.gov](https://www.osha.gov/news/newsreleases/region4/03062019-0?utm_source=openai))