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Worker's death prompts walkout at factory

BY GIANNI COLAVECCHIA
Staff Writer

Employees have walked off the job at a Thornhill company, claiming officials were too slow to help a worker who collapsed at work Thursday morning and died.

Officials weren't saying much about the death of Kamalathan Pathmanathan, a 33-year-old Toronto

father of two, but confirmed it took an ambulance a half-hour to arrive at Canac Kitchens.

Jeyakumar Selvaraj, 40, was among dozens of workers walking around the grounds of the plant after someone shut off its compressors Friday morning.

He said the company, which employs about 500 people, had talked to the workers but refused to answer questions about the death.

"We asked them if he died in the ambulance and they didn't tell us anything," said Selvaraj, a Sri Lankan-Canadian who translated for an immigrant who witnessed the death and gave police a statement.

According to the witness, it took about a half-hour for a foreman to call an ambulance after the 8 a.m. incident. Police confirmed an ambulance left the business around 8:25 a.m., but said they did not know when officials called emergency crews.

With tears welling up in his eyes, Selvaraj said he thinks officials would have acted more quickly if a

non-Sri Lankan suffered the attack.

Several York Regional Police cruisers went to the plant Friday for the protest, but there were no arrests.

A sign in a window near the plant's main entrance Friday read, "Door locked by police order. Only uniformed officers only (sic) allowed in."

Canac president Brian Magee was not available for comment.

York Regional Police Supt. Gord Smyth said police were not treating the incident as suspicious.

"We have no reason to believe anything criminal is involved," he said outside the plant's main entrance. "We don't know what caused it. It could have been anything."

Smyth said workers were refusing to perform their duties because they want answers as to what happened.

The coroner's office was conducting a post-mortem on Pathmanathan's body at York Central Hospital.

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