

UAW: Majority At VW Plant Have Signed Union Cards

Erik Schelzig, Tom Krisher, Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — A majority of workers at Volkswagen's assembly plant in Tennessee have signed cards favoring the union's representation in creating a German-style works council at the plant, a top United Auto Workers official said.

Gary Casteel, a Tennessee-based regional director for the UAW, told The Associated Press that the cards include a statement about wanting to join VW's Global Works Council and supporting cooperative and collaborative relations with the company. The cards are as legally binding as an election by the workers at the plant in Chattanooga, he said.

Union representation at Volkswagen would signal a sea change in labor relations among foreign automakers who have resisted unions at their plants in the South.

Foreign-based automakers have resisted the union because of what they consider added costs, burdensome work rules and added layers of bureaucracy. The UAW has tried to get away from that, portraying itself as an ally of the automakers as they try to boost productivity.

"With input from the employees they can increase their through-put, quality, efficiency, health and safety," Casteel said.

But Republican politicians in the region have expressed fears that a UAW foothold at Volkswagen could spread to other automakers and hurt future recruiting efforts.

Casteel said the union has not put a formal timeline on when it would seek official recognition at the plant.

"We're interested in bringing a new labor model to the U.S.," he said. "That's the reason we continue to work on this."

In Germany, wages are bargained through the union, while works councils negotiate plant-specific matters like job security and working conditions.

Labor representatives, who make up half of the Wolfsburg, Germany-based automaker's supervisory board, have pressured VW management to enter discussions about union representation at the U.S. plant. The Chattanooga factory is alone among Volkswagen's major factories around the world without formal labor representation.

Plant managers last week sent a letter to workers at the plant confirming discussions with the UAW about the creation of a works council in Chattanooga.

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Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

That move drew [the ire of Republican U.S. Sen. Bob Corker](#) [1], a former Chattanooga mayor, who said Tuesday that Volkswagen would become a "laughingstock" if it welcomed the UAW into its plant.

A Volkswagen spokesman at the plant declined to comment on the UAW claim of having signed up a majority of workers, instead referring to last week's letter that said: "Volkswagen values the rights of its employees in all locations to an operational representation of interests."

Casteel said the UAW has determined it has a "solid majority" of the workers at the plant signing cards. He said all of the union's talks with VW have been amicable. "We hope to continue that," he said.

Casteel would not say when the union would meet with VW again and declined to describe specifics about the framework of a works council proposal. He said the union's role would be "totally different" from established relationships with U.S. automakers.

"I can't give you the details because we're just not ready," he said. "It's a totally new form of representation."

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