

Amazon ordered employee to work despite heatstroke risk, sought to cover up incident

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A former Amazon worker who nearly suffered heatstroke and was ordered by the company to keep working told the International Amazon Workers Voice that Amazon ignored reports of the incident to avoid blame and deny her access to medical attention.

On a sweltering hot summer day in 2016, a young “picker” named Nicole was working on the floor of Amazon’s fulfillment center in Chester, Virginia. Although workers requested that management turn up the air conditioning, Nicole said the company refused. When she nearly passed out, Amazon gave her just 20 minutes of rest and then ordered her back on the floor. The company knew that medical officials warned she could suffer potentially fatal heatstroke.

To this day, Nicole explained, she has been unable to seek medical attention because the corporation ignored a report she filed of the incident.

Amazon workers are familiar with this type of brutal treatment by a corporate giant that prioritizes private profit above the lives of its workers. This is the rule under capitalism: corporations like Amazon cut costs by sacrificing workers’ health to improve the profit margin and enrich the corporate leadership.

“When I made a report about my incident,” Nicole told the IAWV, “I found out they never did my report because they didn’t want to get into trouble. How I found out was I called the Amazon hotline for employees to see if there was a report made so I could go see a doctor about my current condition, and they said they had no report on my incident when I made one. I wanted to because it was a work place accident. And they didn’t want to help me.”

Because the company ignored her report, Nicole said she couldn’t file a workers’ compensation claim or bring a lawsuit against the company for the abuse she said she suffered.

After the incident, Nicole decided that the \$12.50 an hour she made was not worth the risk of suffering from the intense heat on the shop floor. But instead of firing her, the company sent her a letter claiming she left the company through “voluntary resignation due to job abandonment.” Because of this, she was ineligible to collect unemployment benefits.

Out of a job and still feeling the effects of the incident, Nicole says she began to have difficulty being outside during the daytime for long periods of time. Though she has finally found new work, she hasn’t seen a doctor despite ongoing side effects because of the high cost of health care in the US. She fears her health will never be the same.

“Ever since I left Amazon I have been having problems with heat in general,” she said. “I haven’t gotten medical attention for it because I had no job and no health insurance. I loved being outside before, and now I can’t enjoy the summertime as I used to. I am basically cursed because of them.”

Nicole is not alone. She described horrific conditions at the Chester, Virginia fulfillment center, which was featured in a 2015 article, “The Life and Death of an Amazon Warehouse Temp.”

“From what I have heard,” Nicole said, “one person had died from a heart attack there. I also heard someone killed themselves by jumping from one of the floors, and not quite sure about the other [deaths at the facility]. We also had a lot of workplace injuries where ambulances were called.”

“But no matter what circumstances we were under, management always told us to keep working even if we were hurting. They told us to take some painkillers and get back to work.”

Nicole said it is hard to find news articles of many of the deaths, since Amazon “keeps that under wraps”

because they don't want people to know so they can get people to work for them." She added, "They don't like us talking about it."

Despite these conditions, some workers drive from as far away as North Carolina to work at the Chester fulfillment center. Temporary workers make \$10 an hour, and many other workers at the facility make \$12.

Nicole expressed gratitude that the *International Amazon Workers Voice* was exposing sweatshop conditions at Amazon fulfillment centers.

"I am for the cause," she said. "I am all for uniting to show Amazon that they need to listen to how they are treating their people. We work far too hard. I want Amazon to do better or be shut down. I hate seeing my friends being worked to the very core to the point of almost disabling themselves. I don't want anyone to go through what I am going through right now. I can't even go to amusement parks which are my favorite places without having a threat of heatstroke."

She said she would share the IAWV with her friends who still work at the facility and encouraged other workers across the world to step forward and share their stories of abuse.

Amazon workers: contact the IAWV today and help expose Amazon's exploitation of the working class. We protect anonymity and don't use names without your approval. Sign-up to receive updates, "like" the IAWV on Facebook, and share this article with your coworkers.



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