

California Amazon worker speaks out:

“Amazon fired me because I complained about age discrimination”

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The *International Amazon Workers Voice* (IAWV) was recently contacted by a former employee at the Amazon distribution center in Patterson, California, who was fired by the company last December after receiving three dubious “write-ups.” The 51-year-old worker, who wished to remain anonymous, asserts that she faced age discrimination and was driven out of her job after filing a complaint.

“I was fired because I filed a complaint against a manager. If it had been just another associate, it probably would have been different... There is age discrimination involved, and there are several people that are being held back from being promoted because of it. I made a stink about it, so I ended up getting fired under false pretenses,” she told the IAWV.

Thousands of workers at Amazon have stories of abuse at the hands of the corporate giant, which treats workers like raw material for exploitation. “It’s sickening,” the worker said. “It’s crazy. They’re making money hand over fist, and they can’t take care of their workers? They work us to death and then basically when there’s nothing left, they get rid of them and replace them with a new batch. We just carry them on our backs, and when our backs break they kick us to the side and get somebody else.”

Soon after she began working for Amazon in 2013, she became interested in job training to learn the skills for “Problem Solve,” a form of quality control at Amazon warehouses. After being told repeatedly for over a year that she would be trained in the near future, and seeing younger, newly-hired coworkers offered the training, she decided to speak with the “Learning Center,” a precursor to speaking with Human Resources (HR).

In response to her complaint, she says an official at the “Learning Center” responded, “Well, you know, Amazon is a younger company and you would probably feel better if you got a job somewhere else.”

When she filed a complaint, the company ignored her, she said. “As far as I know the person that told me I should work somewhere else never even got reprimanded. None of the managers were reprimanded. I was the one who paid for it. I lost my job, I lost my insurance, I lost everything,” she told the IAWV.

That’s when she says the retribution began.

She explained that she transferred to a new unit but that during her training, the manager who was training her was pulled away and she ended up only receiving an hour-and-a-half of training before being sent to work.

Within her first month of stowing while under-trained, she received her first write-up for a “miscount,” three of which result in firing. While management told her they would send someone to complete her training after her first write-up, she asserts that they didn’t do so until after her third write-up, at which point she was already set to be fired.

“What they do, and at least our facility is famous for doing this, is they wait until you’re at least halfway through your shift and then pull you off the floor and escort you out the door. It’s awful... You have to walk through the warehouse to get to the front of the building, and that warehouse is 1.5 million square feet.”

After she was fired, she was left without healthcare. Shortly after she began working, she suffered a serious wrist injury, and then later a shoulder injury, both of which are now chronic and have kept her from finding

work elsewhere since being fired. She noted, “Every chronic injury that I now have happened at Amazon.” Losing her health insurance has hindered her recovery, and she is currently unable to lift her injured arm.

Describing the daily injuries at Amazon, she said, “Somebody's always getting hurt in the warehouse, usually shoulders, elbows, wrists, backs from picking stuff up. They tell you to ask someone to help you, but people don't want to help because you get what's called 'time on task,' and if your 'time on task' isn't right, you can get written up. So they tell us to ask for help with heavy lifting, but then we can't help because if we do we're 'time off task,' and if we're 'time off task' then we're gonna get written up. So it's a catch-22, you're screwed either way.”

She also described a pattern of favoritism among overseers, who she says tend to place older workers in areas that require them to lift heavier items, seemingly in an effort to drive them out of the company. She noted that the Patterson warehouse “works with everything weighing up to 50 pounds. They knew I had a repetitive injury to my shoulder and wrist from lifting the heavy stuff and they still put me on heavy lifting. If they know there's something wrong with you, it's like they purposely set out to worsen the condition.”

“There's a lot of favoritism. They say there isn't, but you ask anybody that works in AFE where we pack multiples, and they'll tell you who gets the best walls. There are nine walls where the items get sent down in trays and the manager controls what size trays go to which wall. If it's all small items, it'll go to Wall 2. If it's larger items like dog food, bottled water or heavier items, it'll go to Wall 8 or 9. And if you're not in good with one of the managers, they'll make sure that you're stuck down on Wall 8 or 9, which are consistently the worst walls to work on.”

Describing the atmosphere at the Patterson facility, she said, “Demoralized is an understatement. The overall feeling is that you have certain people who are the pets, the favored ones, and they tend to walk all over everybody else.”

She added, “It's ridiculous how much they push you, they push you so hard. If you make quota, you would think they'd be happy. But when you make quota, then they start pushing you harder, because they want more... They keep raising the rates and pushing us harder, and it's like, how are we supposed to keep up

with that? You're talking about young kids that can't even keep up with that.”

She agreed that the entire working class is under assault, including from the Trump administration in the US. She said, “Everything that Trump has done is not geared toward the general populace at all, and we're the ones who are suffering, we're the ones paying for it, and they're just kind of standing on us saying, 'Whatever.' They don't care, they just don't care, but if you were to put one of them in our shoes and have them deal with what we deal with day-to-day, they would not know what to do. They would not be able to handle it.”



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