

AmazonFresh worker reveals: Amazon illegally keeps workers in a freezer for over two hours at a time

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The *International Amazon Workers Voice* (IAWV) recently spoke with a young AmazonFresh worker in Virginia. Launched in 2007, AmazonFresh, the company's online grocery business, delivers groceries to its Prime members in select cities. AmazonFresh represents an effort to directly challenge brick-and-mortar stores in the \$800 billion grocery market. According to *Business Insider*, Amazon plans to open 20 physical AmazonFresh locations over the next two years.

Food and other perishable items in AmazonFresh facilities are stored in refrigerators and freezers with temperatures ranging from 30 to -22 degrees Fahrenheit (-1 to -30 degrees Celsius). "You have no idea where you will be placed that day or what you should wear. I have one co-worker that wears three different layers of clothes that he takes on and off throughout the day," the worker said.

Even though employees are only legally allowed to stay in the freezer for one hour, the worker says management frequently breaks the law. "There are no clocks in the freezer. There is no way you can track time in there. No manager comes to let you know you can get out of the freezer at the end of the hour. You can set an alarm on your phone, but then you have to take off your freezer equipment in -22 degree weather to turn off the alarm. Stopping to check for the time also slows you down—they never stop monitoring your pick rate. If you are assigned to freezer duty after lunch, you'll be in the freezer from 12:25 pm to 3pm."

Amazon recently announced plans to acquire Whole Foods for \$13.7 billion to further strengthen its grip in the food industry. Due to Amazon's dominant position in online retail sales, the exploitative conditions at Amazon are increasingly becoming the norm for the entire working class. To compete with Amazon, Walmart recently

announced plans to make their employees deliver packages during their commute.

"They have you on a string," said the Amazon worker, "most people I know have multiple jobs because they never know when Amazon is going to lay them off." The Amazon worker expressed agreement with a recent article published by IAWV about work conditions in the Maryland and Virginia Amazon plants. "It's obvious you are in contact with workers at the plant: what you described is spot on."

A former student, the worker took a job with Amazon after learning about their \$122 sign-on bonus, an amount roughly equal to one day's pay. However, the worker says the company neglected to inform them accepting the bonus meant signing an 11-month contract. Human Resources also reportedly promised the worker that management would not oversee how fast they moved items on and off the shelves—also known as a pick rate—for at least a few months. "This was a complete and total lie," the worker said, "After four months, I still have never gotten this money and the company added a pick rate after I joined. It was extremely stressful because I thought I would get fired every day."

Turnover among workers was so high that management recently lowered the pick rate at the plant. "The past few weeks they have been hiring people left and right. I'll clock out for lunch and see 2 or 3 massive groups of recruits. I'm sure after Prime Day Amazon will fire all these workers. They are all part-time. Within one week half of them will either quit or get fired."

"We are working 11 hours a day on our feet. We are back at work after three days and our bodies have not had enough time to recover. I'm in my twenties and I'm worn out. They do not care if you are sick or if you are in pain. They do not care if you have kids or obligations, it's

about their bottom line. We are as replaceable as tissue paper,” they said.

The worker also told the IAWV reporter about a recent worker casualty in an Amazon plant in Tennessee due to unsafe conditions at the parking lot. “The Amazon Associates and the truckers share a parking lot at my plant, I think an accident is going to happen eventually,” they said.

The IAWV reporter spoke to the young worker about the enormous potential that the technology Amazon controls could have for the benefit of humanity. “We have the technology available to increase agricultural production, introduce drought resistant crops around the world. You could drop books around the world and make cheaper vaccines for the masses. The only problem is that the top oligarchs do not see a profit in this,” the worker said.

“It is a giant transfer of wealth. The government gave Amazon free dollars to build these plants. We have all these taxes and our infrastructure is falling apart, this helps the top 1 percent of the economic ladder while everyone else suffers and decays,” they said.

Amazon workers can put an end to corporate abuse only by relying on their international unity and their common interest as members of the working class.

Hundreds of thousands of Amazon workers around the world struggle under the same conditions. In each country, the corporation collaborates with the government to attack workers’ living standards and working conditions. To fight against corporate exploitation, workers must have their own organizations—workplace committees—that are independent of the trade unions and the capitalist political parties and whose aim is to advance the interests of the working class and link workers in a common international struggle for social equality.

To learn more about workplace committees, to build one in your warehouse, or to learn more about the *International Amazon Workers’ Voice*, contact us today.



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