

Single mother in Pittsburgh fired by Amazon for not working forced overtime

Samuel Davidson
1 September 2017

Amazon fired a single mother of two at the Pittsburgh warehouse after she requested to go home at the end of her shift and a supervisor approved her request not to work overtime. The woman who has an 11-year-old and a teenage daughter would have missed her ride after working a 4 am to 8 am shift.

Amazon calls its forced overtime policy “flexing-up.”

“She was fired last week for using up her UPT (Unpaid Personal Time Off),” a co-worker told the *International Amazon Workers Voice*. “She only had an hour left and it was a Sunday morning. We had to stay another hour but her ride was leaving. On Sunday there are very few buses and the manager said it was ok for her to go. However, later that day she got an email saying she had used up her UPT and not to come back in.”

The vast majority of workers at Amazon’s Pittsburgh warehouse are part-time. They receive no vacation, sick time or personal days. Instead the company grants workers limited amounts of unpaid time off.

When an employee starts with Amazon they receive 30 hours of UPT time and then an additional 20 every three months. Whenever an employee calls off for any reason: a doctor’s visit; needing to take care of a sick child or relative; or just wanting a day off; they have to use their UPT time. If their account falls to zero, they are fired.

Managers at the Pittsburgh warehouse also make workers use their UPT time if they are unable to work the mandatory overtime after their shift is over. “They will come to us sometimes on our break, sometimes just before the shift ends and tell us that we are flexing up an hour. If you can’t stay, they take away your UPT.

“It’s ridiculous. They take your time for any reason, if you are six minutes late they charge you an entire hour.”

Located in an industrial park on the outskirts of Pittsburgh, bus service is not good during the best of times and awful on Sunday. Workers who rely on the bus have to either walk eight miles to a local shopping center or 1.2 miles to catch the airport express and then they often would have to transfer to another bus and walk again before they get home.

“She has two daughters,” explained her co-worker. “She needs this job to pay her bills. She is a single mother and this was her only job. It is very hard because her children could get sick, need to go to the doctor, need to get ready for school etc. and she needs to be there for them.

“She got an email stating she was fired. That’s how they told her, in an email, just not to come into work any more.

“This is just wrong, you have a billion dollar company and they are firing people who have kids to take care of. How is she going to take care of her kids and pay her rent and other bills?

“She was also supposed to have received some VTO (Voluntary Time Off) for working the midnight to 4 am shift during Amazon Prime Week,” the worker told the IAWV. Voluntary time off is not supposed to count against a worker’s unpaid personal time off.

Amazon Prime Day on July 11 generated sales greater than any other day in the history of the company, including Black Friday or Cyber Monday during the Christmas season. To meet this load, there was a vast increase in work for hundreds of thousands of Amazon workers at fulfillment and distribution centers.

Many workers saw a 25 percent increase in the number of packages they handled in a shift and were forced to work different shifts and overtime to handle the load. To entice workers to work faster and do

different shifts, local managers promised workers they would be rewarded with VTO hours, gift cards and shirts.

“We were told if we worked the midnight shift we would get an extra 50 cents an hour, VTO and gift cards. We never got the VTO or gift cards and it took this billion-dollar company six weeks to pay us the extra 50 cents.

Part-time workers at the Pittsburgh warehouse, even with overtime, are not allowed to work more than 30-hours in a week, meaning the most any of them would have received in so-called bonus pay was \$15.00.

“If she had gotten the VTO they promised her she could have used that and would never have been fired,” the co-worker told the IAWV.

Other workers at the Amazon warehouse confirm the practice of punishing workers for refusing to work forced overtime. Two young workers coming in for the afternoon shift said of the forced overtime, “We were just talking about it, don’t get me started. They act like we don’t have any life except to work for them. We have other commitments besides here. They just want us to drop everything and work for them. If they need us to work all the time, why don’t they just make us full time?”

Answering his own question, he added, “But then they would have to give us health benefits and they will never do that.”

A new employee said she has been advised not to let her UPT fall below 15 hours. “If you can’t work a shift and it gets flexed up to 8 hours, your account can end up at zero very fast and you will be fired. Many people think Amazon is a great company, and so do I, but they also don’t know how we are treated.”



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact