

Workers denounce Amazon for speed-ups after two die on the job

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Two Amazon workers were killed on the job in the US as the company forces workers to speed up work to an unsafe and dangerous pace.

Fifty-nine-year-old Phillip “Lee” Terry of Indianapolis, Indiana was crushed by a forklift around 2:45 p.m. on September 24 while on the job at the plant outside Indianapolis. Twenty-eight-year-old Devan Shoemaker of Millerstown, who was employed by Amazon for seven years, was run over by a truck Sunday, September 19 around 5:15 p.m. while working at the Amazon warehouse in South Middletown Township, Pennsylvania.

Amazon workers at the warehouses where the deaths occurred condemned the corporation as responsible for Terry and Shoemaker’s deaths through work speed-ups aimed at maximizing corporate profits.

One worker remarked, “My employer Amazon talks about safety, but really emphasizes SPEED. Maybe this poor man was worried about his rate, and got a bit careless? Maybe not. In any event he’ll be immediately replaced by another warm body—that is guaranteed. In a few weeks we’ll be working mandatory overtime to ramp up for Christmas sales. Overtime plus very busy. Injury rate will also increase.”

Another former worker of a warehouse where a death occurred said, “Considering IND5’s [Amazon’s Plainfield Fulfillment Center] lack of commitment to safety, this is unsurprising. I hope all of my friends still working there are alright physically, mentally, and emotionally in the face of this tragedy.”

Other workers said the deaths were preventable: “This is just horrible...Someone said it was preventable....Yeah take your time to follow OSHA rules and guidelines before just putting ppl out there....I’ve seen so much in my 8 years...This is the worst at this location.”

Another said, “Too much lack of safety in most facilities. I have worked them for 19 years and have talked to many people and I feel I am qualified to speak on the subject. So sad for the family and co-workers.”

While paramedics and fire fighters responded to the reported workplace accident in Indiana and attempted to save Terry, he was ultimately pronounced dead at the scene. Following an autopsy, an initial report from the Hendricks County coroner indicated that Terry experienced multiple crushing injuries, the most serious of which occurring to his head and torso involving multiple skull fractures that caused traumatic injuries to the brain.

Amazon workers discussing the death on social media suggest that Terry’s death may have resulted from the forklift being in maintenance for repair when it fell on Terry as he was working below it to replace the hydraulic lines.

Terry, the Amazon worker killed in Indiana, is survived by his wife, son, and two grandchildren. He had graduated from Indiana University and previously worked as a supervisor of marketing. While it is unclear how long Terry was employed with Amazon, fulfillment center workers make an average of between \$12.17-\$13.42 an hour.

Devan Shoemaker, who died in Pennsylvania, had initially worked for Amazon as part of their “outbound team,” working to collect orders from the South Middletown warehouse for shipment. He later worked as a yard jockey, docking trucks and directing drivers back into the loading docks.

According to an investigation by Pennsylvania State Police, Shoemaker was killed when he was run over and crushed by a truck while he was working at the fulfillment center’s docking station. Shoemaker reportedly had been attempting to assist the truck’s

driver with loosening the “kingpin” under the truck’s trailer which had gotten stuck. Emergency responders pronounced him dead at the scene, leaving behind a wife and young child.

According to OSHA’s online database, Shoemaker is one of two Amazon workers who have been killed at the Amazon Fulfillment Center in South Middleton since 2014. On June 1, 2014, 52-year-old Jody Rhoads was killed at the South Middleton fulfillment center after sustaining multiple traumatic injuries from being crushed between the seat of a pallet truck she was operating and storage shelves inside the fulfillment center.

While facts surrounding the events leading to Terry being crushed to death by the forklift have yet to be released, his death and those of Devan Shoemaker and other Amazon workers are not simply the result of isolated accidents.

Workplace deaths at Amazon are ultimately the result of the drive for higher and higher corporate profits. At Amazon’s warehouses and fulfillment centers, this takes the form of demanding a workforce that is often required to undertake exhaustive work, fulfilling orders at peak productivity for shifts as long as 11 hours, with mandatory overtime on a day’s notice. In addition, Amazon enforces speed-ups that force workers to frantically attempt to make their productivity requirements or face discipline or being terminated all while performing exhaustive physical labor. Such speed-ups, caused by the drive for profits, naturally result in dangerous working conditions that have resulted both in numerous workplace deaths and serious injuries.

As the Amazon deaths take place, local governments are attempting to outdo one another to give Amazon millions of dollars in taxpayer-financed credits and investment in efforts to court the company to choose their location as a second headquarters. Indianapolis is one of the many US cities whose officials are vying to outbid competing states to court Amazon with tax rebates and giveaways. Any serious investigation by local governments into Amazon’s long documented history of workplace deaths, injuries, and grueling working conditions in establishment circles would be seen as jeopardizing the bid for Amazon to locate their second headquarters in their respective areas. For this reason, the horrific deaths of Terry and Shoemaker will likely produce no calls for better regulation of the

warehouses, paving the way for future deaths.



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