

# Report: Amazon and Tesla among most dangerous workplaces in the US

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In its annual report, “The Dirty Dozen 2018: Employers Who Put Workers and Communities at Risk,” the National Council for Occupational Health and Safety (COSH) ranked Amazon and Tesla as among the most dangerous work environments in the United States, exposing the grim reality that workers face in the modern tech industries.

The report opens with an overview of statistics on workplace injuries and fatalities in the US, noting, “According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 5,190 people died from workplace trauma in 2016, a seven percent increase from 2015 and a 12 percent increase over a five-year period dating back to 2012. [These deaths] include sudden, tragic events—such as falling from a height, being struck by a vehicle or being crushed by a machine.”

The report continues, “In addition to more than 5,000 deaths from acute workplace trauma, an estimated 95,000 workers die annually in the U.S. from cancers, respiratory and circulatory diseases and other illnesses associated with long-term exposure in the workplace.”

“All these deaths were preventable. [...] Thousands of workers would still be alive and with their families today if their employers had followed well-established safety protocols to reduce the risk of injury, illness and death.”

The “Dirty Dozen” report highlights the fact that since 2013 alone, seven workers have been killed at Amazon warehouses in the US, including three workers in a five-week span during the high-volume holiday “peak season” last fall.

Amazon, the world’s largest e-commerce company, has vastly expanded its global operations in recent years through the construction of a network of warehouses across the US and internationally, where workers endure sweatshop conditions and earn poverty-level wages.

The report describes each of the deaths of the seven Amazon warehouse workers since 2013:

1. Devan Michael Washington, 28, September 19, 2017, when he was run over by a truck at an Amazon warehouse in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

2. Phillip Terry, 59, was killed on September 23, 2017, when his head was crushed by a forklift at an Amazon warehouse in Plainfield, Indiana.

3. On October 23, 2017, Karla Kay Arnold, 50, died from multiple injuries after she was hit by a car in the parking lot of an Amazon warehouse in Monee, Illinois.

4. Jeff Lockhart, 29, a temporary employee, was found collapsed and dead from a cardiac event near the end of an overnight shift at an Amazon warehouse in Chester, VA on January 19, 2013. As a “picker,” Lockhart routinely walked upwards of 12 miles per shift.

5. Roland Smith, 57, a temporary employee, was killed after being dragged and crushed by a conveyor belt at an Amazon warehouse in Avenel, New Jersey on December 4, 2013.

6. Jody Rhoads, 52, was crushed and pinned to death by a pallet loader at an Amazon warehouse in Carlisle, Pennsylvania on June 1, 2014. (This is the same facility where Washington was killed last September).

7. An unidentified worker was crushed to death by a forklift at an Amazon warehouse in Fernley, NV on November 4, 2014.

The report omits the death of an unidentified Amazon worker at the new Sacramento, California warehouse last December, who was hospitalized after vomiting blood at the facility, and died the following day. Countless more Amazon workers have been injured on the job, including with chronic and debilitating injuries that will remain with them for the rest of their lives. In the summer months, workers regularly collapse from heat stress in facilities across the world.

Comparable conditions exist at electric car manufacturer Tesla, which also imposes brutal speedup and unsafe conditions at its primary auto plant in Fremont,

California, which employs roughly 10,000 workers. While there haven't been any reported workplace fatalities at Tesla, severe injuries are an almost daily occurrence.

The "Dirty Dozen" report cites data from Worksafe, a COSH affiliate based in Oakland, noting, "Recordable injuries for workers at Tesla Motors were 31 percent higher than for the rest of the automotive industry in 2015 and 2016. [...] The rate of serious injuries among Tesla workers, requiring days away from work, restricted duty or job transfer, was also much higher at Tesla than at other auto factories: more than double the industry average in 2015 and 83 percent higher in 2016."

The grueling and perilous work environments at Amazon and Tesla express the reactionary character of capitalism, which sacrifices workers' bodies to the profit interests of the ruling class. The vast wealth accumulated by Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos (now the richest person in the world, with over \$131 billion) and Tesla CEO Elon Musk (the world's 48th richest person, with over \$19.5 billion) is derived from the brutal exploitation of their respective workforces.

Last week, Amazon released its first quarter earnings report, which included \$1.63 billion in profit, more than doubling the previous year's figure and far greater than analysts had predicted. The boon to profits caused Amazon's stock price to surge 7 percent, which propelled Jeff Bezos' net worth by over \$9 billion in less than two days.

The "Dirty Dozen" report pointedly notes, "[Bezos'] vast wealth depends, in large part, on a business model that features a relentless work pace and constant monitoring of employees. These workplace characteristics, coupled with the lack of an intentional health and safety system program, are a recipe for disaster. Even as Amazon workers are injured and die on the job, the company is playing locality against locality to see which taxpayers will pay the most for the privilege of hosting 'H2Q,' Amazon's proposed second headquarters. Newark, New Jersey, one of twenty finalists, is offering the online retailing giant \$7 billion in taxpayer subsidies."

Amazon has already accrued over \$1.2 billion in tax incentives and subsidies from localities across the US, based on the specious claim that their warehouses boost the local economy and "create jobs." In reality, any jobs created by Amazon are low-wage, often part-time or temporary, and with minimal benefits. Earlier this month, the *Intercept* revealed that Amazon ranks among the top 20 employers of SNAP (food stamp) recipients, in four of five states surveyed, with one-third of their employees in

Arizona receiving SNAP benefits.

The social rights of the working class in the US, including the right to safe and reliable employment, high quality health care, livable wages, and an early retirement, can only be secured through a political struggle against both the Democratic and Republican parties, which both represent the interests of the capitalist class and have overseen the evisceration of workplace safety regulations and the unending transfer of wealth to the rich.

These preventable deaths and injuries confirm what Karl Marx's life-long collaborator Friedrich Engels's wrote in his 1845 work *The Condition of the Working Class in England*:

"When one individual inflicts bodily injury upon another, such that death results, we call the deed manslaughter; when the assailant knew in advance that the injury would be fatal, we call his deed murder. But when society places hundreds of proletarians in such a position that they inevitably meet a too early and an unnatural death, one which is quite as much a death by violence as that by the sword or bullet; when it deprives thousands of the necessities of life, places them under conditions in which they cannot live—forces them, through the strong arm of the law, to remain in such conditions until that death ensues which is the inevitable consequence—knows that these thousands of victims must perish, and yet permits these conditions to remain, its deed is murder just as surely as the deed of the single individual."

To fight for their rights, Amazon and Tesla workers must organize independently of both political parties and the trade unions, which have imposed similar death-trap conditions at unionized factories and warehouses across the country and across the world. This requires the building of rank-and-file committees—controlled and run democratically by the workers themselves—which will link workers across the world in a common fight against the corporations and the governments.

If you have a story to tell about unsafe conditions at your warehouse or factory, contact the *International Amazon Workers Voice* (IAWV) today.



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