

Lawsuit alleges Amazon caused worker's death

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On January 23, 2017, 57-year-old Thomas Becker began his regular 3:30 a.m. shift as a maintenance technician at Amazon Fulfillment Center MDW4 in Joliet, Illinois. Twenty minutes later, he experienced a medical emergency that was compounded by a shockingly delayed response from Amazon, leading to his death. In response, his widow, Linda Becker, has filed a wrongful death lawsuit.

According to the lawsuit, Becker clutched his chest and fell to the ground at 3:50 a.m., begging to his co-workers to come to his aid.

Twenty-five minutes elapsed before Amazon contacted the Joliet Fire Department's station 3, which was less than a half mile away. Minutes later, firefighter/paramedics arrived, yet they were forced to come through the front doors, delayed by conversation with security, and then forced to walk across the 1.5 million-square-foot facility to where Becker lay, rather than being allowed to access his location through a nearby loading dock door. All told, the lawsuit alleges another five to seven minutes were lost, and when they made it to Becker, he was no longer conscious or breathing. He was taken to Presence St. Joseph's Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead at 4:58 a.m., having suffered cardiac arrest.

During the extreme wait for treatment within the warehouse, the lawsuit also claims that none of Amazon's internal medical personnel (Amcare) came to help with a functioning Automated External Defibrillator, and that the boxes that hold AEDs around the warehouse were empty. Shortly after his death, the lawsuit claims, Amazon filled the empty AED boxes throughout the warehouse with functioning AEDs.

Amcare is Amazon's in-house medical service, and in the event of an emergency, workers are told they should not call 911, but call security/Amcare instead.

The *International Amazon Workers Voice* has revealed other incidents involving Amcare which suggest that its role is to intervene into a medical emergency, to initiate a pro-management paper trail about an incident, which can then be used to deny a worker's claim of injury.

The callous response to Becker's death was not an accident, but Amazon policy. Their process is focused on the effort to contain an injury to in-house treatment and reporting, and avoid 911 calls and outside intervention. The lawsuit even notes that "Amazon had in place a written policy that no deaths were to occur on its premises."

Amazon's facilities in Joliet, with over 3,500 workers, make Amazon the largest employer in the whole city. Like many Amazon locations throughout the country, the company was granted enormous tax incentives to locate in the region. The state of Illinois is giving \$82.7 million in tax credits over 10 years in exchange for the pledge to maintain 7,200 jobs at the Joliet and Aurora locations. In 2016, \$1.88 million in tax credits was given out for the Joliet site.

Yet the jobs that it brought to Joliet are almost entirely low-wage jobs with brutal conditions that are often staffed by temps. The temp agency Integrity Staffing Solutions has an on-site location at the MDW4 warehouse, no doubt because the brutal pace of work creates constant turnover that keeps the temp agency busy replacing workers. For every hour an Amazon temp works, Integrity gets to skim an hourly rate into their own pockets. Beyond that, many workers have to go through a probationary period with the temp agency, hoping to be hired directly by Amazon, but could be laid off or pushed out before ever getting hired.

Each aspect of Amazon's warehouse operations is analyzed in extreme detail to extract as much labor as possible from workers, whether it is the constant

increase in their pick or pack rate, or the setup of Amcare to avoid injury reports or outside medical help. Meanwhile, Jeff Bezos has become the richest man in the world, earning more per second than an Amazon worker earns in a month.



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