

Report details suicide crisis inside Amazon facilities

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A new disturbing report released by the *Daily Beast* has revealed an epidemic of 911 calls due to Amazon employees who were driven to the brink of suicide on the job. In the five-year period from October 2013 to 2018, 189 calls were made from 46 Amazon sites. The nature of the calls ranged from employees with suicidal ideations, suicide attempts, and other stress-related mental-health episodes.

The sheer geographic scale of the epidemic is staggering on its own. The 46 warehouses comprised an area of 17 states—one-fourth of Amazon’s sorting and fulfillment centers in the US. There are likely many incidents that have gone unreported as many Amazon warehouses either claimed to not keep logs concerning suicide reports or openly refused information requests from the *Daily Beast*.

Text transcripts of 911 calls obtained by the news source described grisly scenes such as an individual who had “cut himself three or four times” with Amazon warehouse issue box cutters. Another suicidal employee at a facility in Hebron, Kentucky, was described by police as “pregnant and threatening [her] baby.” Another employee in Joliet, Illinois, had expressed the desire to “stab herself in the stomach.” A young man in a warehouse center in Chester, Virginia, threatened to jump from the second floor of the building. Other workers attempted suicide by overdosing on opioids or other medications.

An older worker at a facility in Jacksonville, Florida, in 2017 had said “she was going to go home and kill herself” because she had just been fired, according to a sheriff’s report. A supervisor found her crying and hitting her head against a wall after she had been told she had been dismissed. She told the supervisor that she “did not have anything to live for.” She told a sheriff’s officer she planned to slit her wrists with a butter knife

and had previous suicidal ideations.

A young worker at a warehouse in Etna, Ohio told emergency responders that “With all the demands his employer has placed on him and things he’s dealing with in life is [sic] becoming too much and [he is] considering hurting himself,” according to the sheriff’s report. He had been working at Amazon “for over a year and is frustrated with his employment because he felt he was lied to by Amazon at his orientation. He keeps saying the company told him they valued his employment and would be treated as if he mattered and not just a number.”

“It’s this isolating colony of hell where people having breakdowns is a regular occurrence,” former Amazon employee Jace Crouch told the *Daily Beast*. Crouch had himself experienced an emotional breakdown on the job at a warehouse in Lakeland, Florida.

The staggering figures are no doubt an expression of the social crisis within the US as a whole. According to figures from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the US suicide death rate rose to the highest in 50 years in 2017. Since 2008, it has ranked as the 10th leading cause of death for all ages in the US. In 2016, suicide became the second leading cause of death for ages 10–34 and the fourth leading cause for ages 35–54.

The mental health crisis that has exploded within the corporate behemoth is the direct result of the brutal exploitation of its workforce. Amazon and its owners stand atop a mountain of broken bones, hernias, torn knee and back muscles, heat strokes, stress-induced asthma attacks, and countless other lifelong bodily injuries. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, now the richest man in the world, is complicit in this social tragedy.

Coverage by the *International Amazon Workers’ Voice* (IAWV) newsletter has cited reports by workers

at multiple facilities who have seen coworkers sleeping in their cars. Inside the facilities, workers face a high-tech dystopia, characterized by long hours and an authoritarian industrial regime.

Amazon whistleblower Shannon Allen, who attracted worldwide attention when she began posting videos on YouTube documenting her descent into homelessness after being injured at Amazon, spoke with the IAWV on the epidemic.

She began by stating she believed the number of workplace suicide crises were likely much higher than those documented. “I can clearly see that this number right here should be doubled, without a doubt,” she said. “Because of the strenuous work you do inside Amazon, I fully believe [the stories] one thousand percent. These aren’t lies and they’re not myths.”

Allen described conditions in Amazon facilities as miserable and even panic-inducing. “You’re almost in anxiety for 10 hours straight,” she explained. “For me personally, my chest would tighten up so much it would feel like I was having a heart attack when I was in there. If one of the robots stall out, or if your count is wrong, or the computer has a malfunction, or the battery on your scanner dies, that all plays a factor in if you have a job the next day.”

“It’s mainly the job itself but there are other factors too,” she continued. “I mean, how you even get *to and from* work, having money *to eat* while you’re working that 10-hour shift. Whether or not you’re even able to go to the *bathroom*. People choose to not go to the bathroom because their rates will drop. And then you have to work double time just to be able to make rate. That’s why we hear stories like the one with that guy peeing in a bottle.”

Allen described her own painful experiences of getting injured on the job and the severe financial, physical and emotional stress it caused in her life. “I had to be put on anxiety and depression medication because of this whole ordeal of getting injured at Amazon and getting the runaround from them. I couldn’t concentrate, I couldn’t sleep. It messed with me really, really bad.”

“I fell into this deep, dark hole where I just didn’t want to live,” she continued. “The struggle of going through this day in and day out. It f***** me up really bad. It hurt me so bad. The only thing that I can do is speak out for everybody else who doesn’t have that

voice. Because I’m not scared. I’m not gonna lose everything. I’ve already lost it all. Now comes the fighting back.”



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