

ASOS worker in UK speaks on unsafe conditions in warehouse

Our reporter
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The WSWS received the following comments from an ASOS warehouse worker about how safety protocols have been ignored.

WSWS: How is the situation in the workplace since the safety protocols were agreed on March 26?

ASOS worker: It all looks good on the outside (one-way system, tents with thermo-cameras), but inside they care less and less every day. How can 150-200 pickers work keeping 2-metres distance and yet sharing the same equipment? They sent 10 pickers on overtimes home today because they did not meet their performance targets. Just today, the operations manager at the briefing said that since they get paid double time there is no excuse not to meet their performance target. They act like the money came out of their own pockets. We are very busy now, there are over 2 million items to send. They have erected plastic curtains between the benches in order to use them all, not every other one to keep the 2-metre social distancing rule.

WSWS: How many workers are there now on-site?

ASOS worker: As far as I know, Barnsley council allows the company 500 people on-site per shift, and I'm sure there are way more. I would say normally it is 800-900 people on-site. Now they are offering overtime, so I would say there are slightly more than that. Shifts are eight hours long; due to the current situation, we leave 45 minutes earlier. Breaks are 45 minutes long, and we need to wait 10 minutes to enter the canteen as they allow 80 people at a time. Most people have returned to work already; there are only few still on self-isolation. I don't know if anyone tested positive.

WSWS: How about social distancing during the break times?

ASOS worker: There is a queue to enter the canteen because there can be a maximum of 80 people at once.

We have to wait 10-15 minutes to even enter, although our break time has not been extended.

They shout, "2 metres, guys!" even though we are just having breakfast sitting 50 cm away from each other and the table wasn't cleaned before or after.

I took some photographs for you to show the situation. That was taken during a break when it wasn't crowded (my section was the first one to go).

WSWS: How about the additional cleaning that was meant to guard against infection?

ASOS worker: They don't clean the benches between shifts, they come every one, two, sometimes every three hours after we start and wipe it down. Once I said, "Seriously? Now you're coming? Now there are only my germs all over it." They move people around because something needs to be packed, but we don't know whether it was cleaned or who was working there before.

The ASOS worker explained that the company has withdrawn the £20 a week allowance per worker that was issued to help avoid using public transport and ensure social distancing. ASOS claims that it has increased bus frequency to reduce overcrowding, but this has been contradicted by evidence referred to in our previous article.

The use of thermal imaging is not merely a cosmetic exercise. It is further proof that the company is using the pandemic to justify increased surveillance techniques that have little validity in monitoring or containing the virus. Amazon is using the same techniques. The World Health Organisation has stated as much, since a person can be carrying the virus for up to two weeks while remaining asymptomatic.



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