

“This is a modern-day sweatshop”

Amazon workers speak out against inadequate safety measures

Our reporters
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The *World Socialist Website* spoke with Amazon workers about the unsafe conditions at Amazon warehouses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The names of the workers have been changed in order to protect them from company retaliation.

On its website, Amazon claims that “[o]ur top concern is ensuring the health and safety of our employees.” But the reality is just the opposite. As the company makes money hand over fist from the pandemic’s boost to online retail sales, hundreds of thousands of low-wage workers labor for long hours in unsafe and, after a glut of new hires to handle the increase in sales, cramped conditions in the company’s fulfillment centers, making them potential centers for the spread of the disease.

As with most other large US corporations, Amazon is concealing the spread of the virus among its workforce from public scrutiny. The most comprehensive count of infections and deaths at Amazon comes from a former Amazon worker, Jana Jumpp, who has been compiling statistics sourced from the rank and file.

Stephanie, a warehouse worker, said: “They gave us a temporary two-dollar raise that ended in May which wasn’t hazard pay. Instead they had given unlimited unpaid time off from March till the end of April. Then we got the two-dollar raise still till the end of May and then they took that as well. They had pretty much been trying to encourage people to come to work because of all the doomsday shopping with toilet paper and what not.

“They added a safety team that yells at people but there is no action for not wearing a mask or not social distancing. And now it’s July. They gave us a bonus; however, it was only \$500 for full-time employees and

\$250 for seasonal. They started hiring seasonal employees in March to help and they haven’t stopped since. They hire about 60 people a day just at my building, so now the entire facility is crowded.

“There’s no room in any of the breakrooms for people to eat and it’s almost impossible to social distance when switching shifts. This is especially because they’ve called mandatory overtime for the last three weeks in a row while we keep being informed of multiple COVID cases in the building.

“So, everyone is now required to work 11-hour shifts or they have to use time off. Plus, the building is getting hotter and the air conditioning either doesn’t work well enough or there isn’t any. Half the stations don’t have fans; people are claiming they can’t wear masks because of the heat. And now the building is almost running shifts on top of each other because the mandatory overtime day shift comes in an hour early and the night shift leaves an hour late. And we still are getting notified of more COVID cases.

“They keep warning us about heat stroke, but I feel as though a man that’s about to be a trillionaire [Bezos] can afford to properly air condition his buildings and continue paying us hazard pay. A 500-dollar bonus after taxes was about 311 bucks. That doesn’t help much!

“There is a lot of irony in the fact that he’s (Jeff Bezos) also making a bunch of money selling Trump and Blue Lives Matter merchandise, while our building runs Juneteenth info on the tv screens. And a lot of make-up products and luxury goods and such are counterfeit.”

Amazon dominates the online retail space, servicing over 6 million third-party sellers with over 350 million

products online. Many of the sellers are not properly vetted, and claims of fraud have sharply increased over the recent years. Amazon spent over \$500 million last year launching a Counterfeit Crimes Unit, composed of “former federal prosecutors, experienced investigators, and data analysts.”

Stephanie also explained the mistreatment and coercive practices by management. “I realized that when I went to complain that my manager was being incredibly rude, and the senior HR rep basically told me she can discipline me how she wants and that I should be grateful I’m making money.

“It’s also seemingly not fair because they are adding required hours to our schedules, but we aren’t being compensated with more [paid time off] in any way. So, we are being required to work more hours, even if I didn’t feel well I’d have to come to work because I do not have the extra time off balance for the new extra long shift.”

Jeff, an Amazon worker in Las Vegas said: “Unethical, careless and negligent would be a few words I have to describe my experience and the experience of many of my coworkers here at Amazon. With 115-degree Las Vegas heat, they have no air conditioning other than what they call ‘Swamp coolers,’ which are only good to spread the virus around this place! I think to myself, is this a warehouse or a modern-day sweatshop, because this place is just a huge sauna... Clearly Amazon is everything but what people make it out to be with working conditions like these!

“They have a mediocre temperature checker right when you walk in, as if having a high temperature was the only symptom of COVID-19. This means that anyone can go in showing symptoms other than high temperature with no hesitation. They say ‘6 feet apart’ but sometimes not even the managers follow that rule, making others think it’s okay to violate that rule. The hypocrisy in my warehouse is insane.

“Another thing are the masks. We were given two cotton masks every 2 months instead of a clean one each day. I find that gross and appalling due to how hygiene is not a regulation in Amazon warehouses. Rules were to wash them ourselves and hope for the best.”

Both Stephanie and Jeff agree with the move by autoworkers, with the assistance of the *World Socialist*

Web Site, to form rank-and-file safety committees.

Stephanie said “Amazon has their own safety committee but they don’t do anything. There’s no repercussions for breaking rules besides like cell phone use so they’re just trying to pump as much work out of as many people as possible. Most of my coworkers [agree]. People are getting quite fed up.”

Jeff added, “Totally agree on all of those demands! Workers have to be tested each day for it to work? You can be okay one day then, ‘boom!’ You get sick from a coworker the next day and so on. And [the demand for trained medical personnel, independent of management and reporting directly to safety committees] is a big one! We are being forced to work. They should give us unlimited time off if we need it.”

If you’re an Amazon Worker and want to help forming a rank-and-file safety committee at your workplace, contact the WSWs International Amazon Workers Voice.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)