

Baltimore Amazon workers forced to remain on the job amid bomb threats on 9/11 anniversary

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Amazon workers in Baltimore's BWI2 fulfillment center were forced to remain at their job site following a series of bomb threats which were called in between Saturday, September 11, the 20th anniversary of the September 11 terror attacks, and Tuesday, September 14.

Workers that contacted the *International Amazon Workers Voice* described BWI2 management's cynical and disorganized response to the danger.

"A call was made in the early hours of Sunday morning claiming a bomb had been placed in the building; [the] building was evacuated sometime between 4-4:30 a.m., and folks were not let in until around 10 a.m. or shortly after," one worker said. "The scene outside the building was crazy," said the worker. There were "people... everywhere and anywhere...in their cars, spread throughout the lot. Some drove off, some drove back....a pure unorganized mess."

On Monday, a second and possible third threat were called in. The worker said management decided to "take their chances and not pull another evacuation alarm." The worker confirmed "that although 911 was called and police and fire departments showed up, a bomb squad was NOT called in."

Workers reported seeing FBI agents in "tactical gear" swarming the building following threats on Sunday, September 12. "Getting a little nervous the later it gets here at Amazon BWI2, with the past two nights ending with bomb threats," stated one worker on Facebook. "It's just so crazy they haven't canceled any shifts or anything," the worker said. Other workers on social media added that management hadn't told workers the details of the threat "because of fear that everyone would leave, so much for our safety."

Efforts by the IAWV to contact Amazon's press office to confirm the existence of the threats produced a boilerplate response by company spokespeople: "We're thankful everyone is safe and accounted for, with no immediate threat to the site or employees." The spokesperson directed further inquiries to the Baltimore Police Department.

The BWI2 facility has over 2,500 full-time personnel, with thousands of part-time workers in an adjacent building. "BWI2 stretches over 1 million square feet, about the size of 28 football fields. Inside, it holds tens of millions of products and more than 14 miles of conveyor belts," the company's website says.

Workers inside the facility described a complete disruption of the facility's operations. "Every half-an-hour the alarm was going off," said Marc, a worker at BWI2 and a member of the Baltimore Amazon Workers Rank-and-File Safety Committee. "I'm asking myself, 'Why am I even in this building right now?' The pickers can't pick, the stowlers can't stow, the stockers couldn't stock," because significant operations were shut down during the security threat. Workers noted that the company was not sending out text alerts to its workers or explaining the situation.

To add insult to potential injury, workers stated that fellow associates had been asked to take Unpaid Time Off (UPT) while the management suspended on-site operations until the late morning on Sunday. In at least one circumstance, the UPT that had been deducted from them had not been given back.

BWI2, as with Amazon's fulfillment centers around the world, has remained in operation throughout the pandemic. As with Amazon's other locations, the facility has prioritized the profitability of its operations

over the health and safety of its workers, forcing them to work with minimal safety precautions and social distancing. Protections implemented at the start of the pandemic such as mask requirements, staggered shift times and the suspension of in-person staff meetings were gradually eliminated. In August, amid the surge of the Delta variant in the United States, the company announced a return of its mask guidance.

In a situation eerily similar to Amazon's dismissing of the threats at BWI2, a *New York Times* investigation into Amazon's response to COVID-19 in New York City revealed “[w]hile Amazon said publicly that it was disclosing confirmed cases to health officials, New York City records show no reported cases until November,” or nearly eight months after the pandemic started.

To this day, Amazon has only once reported publicly the number of cases in its facilities, when it announced last October that 20,000 Amazon workers had been infected since the start of the pandemic.

In the past month there have been numerous similar threats called into Amazon fulfillment centers around the United States. On August 17, Macon, Georgia's SAV3 fulfillment center was evacuated after a threat was called in. According to local press, “Employees evacuated the warehouse and spent about four hours outside while the Bibb County Sheriff’s Office Bomb Disposal Unit and K-9’s checked the building.” A threat to Amazon's Jeffersonville, Indiana facility on August 24 resulted in the Louisville Metro Police Department deploying bomb-sniffing dogs and other precautions after the facility was evacuated.

The BWI2 facility has faced severe threats in the past. In 2018, two workers died after a warehouse wall collapsed on them during an extreme weather event. Workers Espana Argote and Andrew Lindsey, ages 37 and 54, were found buried in debris after an EF-1 tornado with winds of approximately 105 miles per hour struck the facility. It is unclear if workers had been given orders by the company to shelter in place.



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