

Power outage in Amazon's cloud service disrupts technology throughout the United States

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10 December 2021

A major power failure in Amazon's cloud service on Tuesday disrupted operations throughout the United States. The power failure, which originated in Amazon Web Services' critical US-East-1 region centered in Northern Virginia, disrupted personal home appliances, scores of websites dependent on the cloud, as well as internal Amazon operations.

By 11:20 a.m. the outage tracker *Downdetector.com* had gotten 11,300 reports of technology failures from Boston, Massachusetts to Houston, Texas. The company was forced to redirect web traffic to servers in its western regions until the disruptions were resolved.

AWS released a public statement Tuesday, stating cryptically that the "root cause" of the malfunction was the "impairment of several network devices." The web giant promised that it had "observed some early signs of recovery" by late Tuesday evening but did "not have an ETA for full recovery."

According to *CNBC*, "[w]orkers [at Amazon's warehouses] were told to stand by in break rooms and loading areas" while services remained down. Many workers took to social media as operations ground to a halt, with scanners unable to function and conveyor belts motionless.

"It was horrible sitting there for five hours," said an Amazon worker from Baltimore to the *World Socialist Web Site*. "They would not give VTO (voluntary time off) to us because that's what they did to the shift before us," the worker said. "What do [you] want us to do, twiddle our thumbs?" wrote another worker on social media.

"Dead Roombas, stranded packages and delayed exams," read a headline published on *CNBC*. In addition to Amazon warehouses whose operations are

linked with the cloud, consumer online technology such as Ring, Alexa, Chime and dozens of websites lost services. This included streaming services Netflix, Roku and Disney+, commercial vendors such as Ticketmaster to small independent online vendors who rely on Amazon to sell their goods.

John Taylor, a Public.com user who "recently lost his travel-industry job and began day trading to help pay for his three daughters' holiday gifts," told the *Wall Street Journal* that he was "definitely upset" after losing \$3,000 due to service failures.

The e-commerce giant's cloud services arm provides over 33 percent of the globe's cloud infrastructure, according to Synergy Research, ahead of other internet technology giants, such as Microsoft (20 percent) and Google (10 percent). Web infrastructure is a "huge profit center for Amazon," notes the Associated Press, with AWS's third quarter revenue at \$16.1 billion, 39 percent more than its take last year.

Doug Madory of the network intelligence firm Kentik Inc. told the AP that he did not think "nefarious activity" was at the root of the disruption. "More and more these outages end up being the product of automation and centralization of administration," he said. This can cause "outages that are hard to completely avoid." Sid Nag of the technology research firm Gartner Inc. remarked to the *WSJ* that "[t]hese guys have almost become too big to fail."

The AWS outage follows a similar loss of service across Facebook (which recently changed its name to Meta Platforms, Inc.) in October. J. Eckhert, vice president of Ecosystem at the block chain app Chia, tweeted at the time that the system's failure was "[e]ither the most sophisticated & coordinated hack of

all time, OR the biggest human error ever.”

The WSWS wrote at the time that the “dependence of billions of people on the stability of online social networks for critical daily tasks” raised the “necessity for the expropriation of these advanced technologies” and placing them under the democratic control of society rather than in the hands of a wealthy few.

The disruption occurs as Amazon is seeking to ramp up its services during the holiday season amid an ongoing shortage of labor. “The problems come amid Amazon’s critical holiday shopping season when the e-commerce giant can ill afford delays that could potentially create lasting log-jams,” stated the Los Angeles *Daily News* .

According to *Internetretailing.net*, Amazon’s annual “Black Friday and Cyber Monday events broke records this year” in terms of online purchases. This was partially driven by the holidays and partly by what the e-commerce hub referred to as the “the Omicron effect,” the emergence of the new coronavirus variant.

According to the retailer’s website, the return to mass online purchases would “increas[e] pressure on supply chains that are already under strain.” The website noted comments from David Jinks, head of research at ParcelHero: “We don’t expect the return of a pre-Christmas lockdown. ... In some ways this is good news for online retailers—and store retailers with a strong website. However, given ongoing driver shortages, port delays, and supply chain issues, a further surge in online orders may be the straw that breaks the camel’s back.”



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