

“There is no reason people should have been scrambling last minute to get to shelter”: Sister of worker killed in Amazon warehouse crushed by tornado speaks out on lack of safety

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On Monday the WSWS spoke to Rachel Cope, whose brother, Clayton Lynn Cope, was killed in an Amazon warehouse in Edwardsville, Illinois while trying to alert his coworkers to seek cover as a tornado barreled down upon the facility. Over 100 are feared dead in the wake of the multi-state tornado outbreak.

Numerous warnings were made in the days and hours leading up to the tragedy by local news and the National Weather Service of tornadoes Friday night, with tornado sirens even being ignored by management in the minutes leading up to the tragedy. With blatant disregard for workers' safety and lives, Amazon did not cancel the shift, resulting in six deaths when half of the flimsy building collapsed as a tornado tore through it.

Chase Lawrence: I read another article on factory workers being threatened with being fired after they voiced concerns and asked if they could leave at the Mayfield, Kentucky candle factory, which was also smashed in the storm. Do you know of the concerns being voiced at the Amazon plant by workers before the tornado hit?

Rachel Cope: I do, drivers were wanting to go home but they were telling them they could not and had to come back to the warehouse even though sirens were actively going off. My father worked in the same building and he was on the phone with my brother right before the building collapsed and my brother was going to warn the incoming drivers to get inside to the shelter since they had not been allowed to get to their own

shelter.

Sirens had sounded twice before the tornado hit and there is no reason that employees were not allowed to get to the shelter after the first siren and severe weather warning.

CL: It's really reckless and criminal what they did, especially even after the sirens went off twice. Did Amazon say anything preceding the storm? There were weather reports days out from the National Weather Service and local news warning of tornadoes on Friday night, so they must have been well aware of the risk.

RC: There is no reason people should have been scrambling last minute to get to shelter. There should be protocol in place for inclement weather, Christmas rush or not. It's sickening. And they did not that I am aware of. Not that I am surprised.

CL: What are workers at the plant saying about the collapse, or sort of the general feeling or sentiment?

RC: They are feeling unsafe and not protected, from what I have heard.

CL: Did you hear about Jeff Bezos's response to the warehouse collapse, which was on Saturday?

RC: I did not, I was not expecting much from him.

CL: Well, you would be correct. He sent some boilerplate response Saturday evening, only after celebrating the landing of his space tourism-vehicle Blue Origin, and an earlier photo op that day. He also had a party set up that day, but since he was in West, Texas that morning it is not known if he attended it. His tweet did not go over well.

RC: What an empty response to building a work culture of profits over livelihood. Workers were too afraid of being reprimanded by the company around the holidays that they did not think about their lives being in danger, and that should never be how someone feels in their workplace.

CL: I read your brother was rushing to help people get to safety. Could you speak to that, what was happening at the point? How were people getting to the shelter, what did that look like?

RC: There were drivers being forced to come back to the warehouse. While my dad was on the phone with my brother Clay, he was saying he was going to go and warn them to get to the shelter because they had only been told to return to the warehouse, that they could not go home or anything like that, so someone had to warn them. He was going to the other side of the building since the shelter was on the opposite side of where the drivers would be coming in to help when the building collapsed.

CL: Thank you for taking the time to speak on this. Are there any remarks or anything else you would like our readers to know?

RC: Just to be mindful of where you are shopping this year for the holidays. And to really start to think about how workers are treated and made to feel in the workplace when you are considered a low-wage worker.



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