

# Amazon worker killed in fulfillment center accident in Fort Wayne, Indiana

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A 20-year-old Amazon worker died from blunt force injuries suffered during an accident involving an overhead conveyor at the Fort Wayne, Indiana fulfillment center on Monday.

A statement to the media from Allen County Coroner Dr. Jon Brandenberger said that Caes David Gruesbeck “was transported by EMS to a local hospital where death was pronounced shortly after arrival.”

The coroner who completed the autopsy reported that the cause of the young worker’s death was “blunt force injury” from an “industrial accident.” Dr. Brandenberger said that the incident is under investigation by the Fort Wayne Police Department, the Allen County Prosecutor’s Office and the Allen County Coroner’s Office.

The death of Gruesbeck was initially reported by the Allen County Sheriff’s Department, which said a worker had been taken to the hospital in critical condition where he was pronounced dead.

A spokesperson for the Allen County Sheriff said on Wednesday that the investigation is ongoing, but “foul play” was not suspected. The spokesperson said Gruesbeck was operating some kind of heavy machinery when he sustained a head injury, but no further details were available.

According to information provided by Amazon to the media, the equipment Gruesbeck was operating is called a one-man lift. The email message also said the injury came while Gruesbeck was trying to resolve a jam on a conveyor and hit his head on an overhead conveyance system.

The average wage of an Amazon warehouse worker in the state of Indiana is \$14.99 per hour. A forklift operator at Amazon in Indiana earns an average of \$17.55 per hour.

A report by the Associated Press on Wednesday

quoted Maureen Lynch Vogel, Amazon’s head of global safety PR and media relations, who said the warehouse was closed on Monday and remains closed while employees continue to be paid. As of Thursday, Vogel reported that fulfillment center had been reopened.

On Tuesday evening, a group of Gruesbeck’s coworkers organized a lantern memorial outside the warehouse. Fellow worker Carter Amos told 21Alive TV, “As far as you know, not having him around here anymore, I don’t think anyone’s going to get used that not being a familiar face around here anymore.”

Amos added that it was difficult to process what happened on Monday, “You always think about that, you know, it could be me or it wouldn’t be me kind of thing or you kind of think it would never be you.” Amos said, “Then you see it happen to someone else and the realization kind of sinks in of like that could be you.”

Coworker Rosa Garcia, who works alongside Amos, said the situation has been traumatizing. She told 21Alive, “Having somebody pass away here, I’m not going to look at this job the same way again, I’m going to be extra cautious for sure.”

Amazon worker Chanthana Taymany took to Facebook to post her memories of her fellow worker, “RIP Caes. You were always optimistic and hardworking. I loved listening to all the adventures you went on and the ones you wanted to go on. I’ll miss working with you and seeing your kind and caring personality. You always offered to help anyone and always was eager to learn. You’re taken away too soon my friend. My condolences to your family and friends. I pray for your loved ones. RIP Caes”

Others spoke out in anger on social media about Amazon and the treatment of workers by the company.

Said one worker: “I’m sure the supervisors told everyone to keep working and pick up the pace.”

“The way these big corporations work they already found someone to replace him, they could care less,” another said.

Several people reported on social media that Gruesbeck was clearing a conveyor jam when his hair got entangled in the equipment.

On Wednesday, news outlets reported that the Indiana Occupational Safety and Health Administration (IOSHA) is investigating the death, however there is no information available on the IOSHA website about it.

Amazon employees in the fulfillment center pack customer orders, operate equipment and may work at heights up to 40 feet, according to a job description on Amazon’s website.

The Amazon Smith Road fulfillment center in Fort Wayne is a massive building, covering the area of 14 football fields. There are more than 1,000 employees working there. Gruesbeck’s death is the second at an Indiana Amazon facility. In 2017, 59-year-old Phillip Terry of Indianapolis was crushed by a forklift at a distribution center in Plainfield.



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