

Two construction workers airlifted to hospital after sustaining serious injuries at Indiana Amazon warehouse site

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Two workers were airlifted on April 24 for treatment after sustaining serious injuries following a fire at the Amazon Web Services data construction site at New Carlisle, west of South Bend, Indiana.

According to the *South Bend Tribune*, the New Carlisle Fire Department received a call in the morning with a report of two injuries in a construction accident. The fire department received reports that one of the buildings “was filled with smoke and saw people evacuating the area.”

The two injured workers were said to have been treated at the scene by responding medics before it was determined that they needed to be moved to a hospital due to the severity of their injuries.

At the time of this writing, the two men still remain hospitalized, but no information has been released about their condition.

A spokesperson for Amazon Web Services gave the following statement via email. “A small fire at the construction site of a non-operational facility was quickly contained today. Safety is our top priority, and we’re thankful to local first responders for their swift action.” There was not even a mention of the two workers who are currently still in the hospital with severe injuries due to this “small fire.”

The new Amazon Web Services facility is an \$11 billion data center complex. While the size of the facility has not been disclosed publicly, the massive complex spans seven buildings, with three currently in the final stage of inspection. It is anticipated that the campus will house advanced computing infrastructure to support AWS’s cloud services and artificial intelligence capabilities.

A spokesman for the New Carlisle Fire Department told local news network WNDU that fire fighters found a

significant amount of smoke in the building and the surrounding area, but that there were no active fires found at the scene, further shrouding the accident in mystery.

New Carlisle Fire Department’s Assistant Chief Chad Hess, who was on the scene, was able to confirm that the injured workers were two males but would not give their ages. Hess also was unable to provide an update on their condition, citing the “inability to keep in contact with specialty hospitals outside of their reach if they do not have an existing relationship.”

When further pressed about what the victim’s injuries were or whether the men suffered from burns or smoke inhalation, Hess would not give details and only stated again that their injuries were “severe” in nature.

According to the *Tribune* article, there are currently three different government agencies investigating the incident: the New Carlisle Fire Department, fire investigators with the Indiana Department of Homeland Security State Fire Marshal, and the Indiana Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration (IOSHA). When asked, Hess stated that the fire department is working with the investigators with the State Fire Marshal because of the “scenario of injuries.”

When asked about how long the investigation would take, Hess was unable to give a timeline, declaring “there is specialized equipment in the facility that the investigators are not used to” and that they need “subject matter experts, such as electricians,” to provide further information. IOSHA has confirmed that they have a safety inspection in progress.

Even if IOSHA is on site conducting an inspection, it does not mean that workers can trust that a full investigation will be conducted or that the truth of what caused the fire will be made public. As explained in an

earlier article on the WSWs about the death of auto worker Ronald Adams Sr. at the Stellantis engine facility in Dundee, Michigan, investigations that are carried out by state and federal government safety agencies, such as OSHA, are usually whitewashes.

When fines are levied, they are generally token amounts and are often reversed on appeal. This is exactly what happened after the death last summer of Antonio Gaston, a 53-year-old auto worker who was crushed to death on the assembly line at the Jeep Plant in Toledo, Ohio. OSHA levelled a paltry fine of just \$16,000 for the unsafe conditions at the Toledo Jeep Assembly Plant that led to Gaston's death.

One month after the death of a Ronnie Adams Sr., his family is still no closer to learning the truth surrounding his death. The family has yet to be given a death certificate by the Washtenaw County Medical Examiner. Nor has any information been communicated to them by the UAW, plant management or state safety inspectors. The joint UAW-management safety committees are notorious for taking the side of management and typically will shift the blame for deaths or injuries onto the backs of workers.

In response, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees is launching its own investigation into Adams' death.

Workers cannot trust that these agencies or bureaucracies will get to the truth of the incident near South Bend. In fact, under capitalism, companies are more and more putting safety on the back burner.

Workers expressed their anger over this situation on Facebook in response to an article posted by WSBT-TV about the two injured construction workers. One worker stated, "How is it ok to cover it up? Why don't they tell the truth? There was another fatality earlier in this same project." Another worker chimed in, "I wasn't there, but it sounds like an arc flash. If that's what it was someone didn't follow regulations on lock/tag out."

Other workers also speculated that the fire was caused by an arc flash, with one stating, "that is the first thing I thought, that they were not following procedure with the lock/tag out, which resulted in an arc flash."

An arc flash is a type of electrical explosion resulting from a fault in an electrical system, creating an arc between conductors or a conductor and the ground. There can be several causes of an arc flash, including if proper procedures are not followed and if there was any type of equipment failure such as frayed wires, dust accumulation, or moisture. The explosion can ignite a fire

depending on environmental circumstances.

Amazon is notorious for its high-tech exploitation, in which robots and surveillance systems are used to force workers past the point of injury. It also has a sordid history of trying to cover up injuries, even by essentially throwing injured workers out on the street in order to deny them workers' compensation. This is why the whole "safety is our top priority" messaging cannot be trusted.

Earlier in April, a worker at JFK8 Amazon's fulfillment center in Staten Island, New York City was killed when he was struck by a box truck as it was backing up into a loading dock. Leony Salcedo-Chevalier, a 34-year-old father of two daughters, was pronounced dead at the scene.

Although he was not a direct Amazon employee, this situation makes clear that the safety of workers is not important to management, not just at Amazon, but across all industries.

These deaths and many other preventable incidents like it are becoming more and more prominent across industries and workplaces. Safety must be enforced through workers' control over the conditions on the job. Rank-and-file committees are needed, democratically controlled and led by the most trusted and conscientious workers, to conduct their own independent investigations of any injuries and ensure that safety standards are enforced.

As the April 28 statement by the WSWs International Amazon Workers Voice explained, an investigation must be conducted by rank-and-file workers into the circumstances of the tragic death of Salcedo-Chevalier. Following this lead, workers at the AWS Construction Site in New Carlisle, Indiana should also take the initiative and organize a rank-and-file committee to conduct their own investigation into the causes of the injuries of the two construction workers.



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