

Amazon workers locked out of warehouse during tornado

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Amazon delivery drivers say they were locked out of an Oklahoma City warehouse last week during an active tornado warning. Amazon employee Priscilla Maddox captured footage of the moment bosses at the Amazon Flex station turned away drivers seeking shelter after the National Weather Service issued a tornado warning for the area on Tuesday.

The incident took place on the evening of March 10 at an Amazon delivery station at 8707 Pole Road, near the interchange of Interstate 35 and Interstate 240. In addition to the doors being locked, multiple Amazon Flex drivers alleged that management ushered them out of the building while sirens blared.

Maddox was due to run her last route of the day when tornado sirens went off, prompting workers to seek shelter inside of the warehouse. A video she uploaded to TikTok shows the warehouse doors being shut and locked as up to 15 drivers tried to get inside. The video showed the bosses pulling the door down as she begged to be let in while tornado sirens blared.

“Okay, from my understanding, they’re closing the doors on all these people because their priorities are way better than ours. We don’t belong in a safe environment, and we are all out here now,” Maddox said in the TikTok.

In another moment, Maddox exclaimed, “What is wrong people? I don’t get it. You would think they’d be like come in, be safe. No.”

Maddox and her boyfriend, Cody Townsend, who is also an Amazon Flex driver, said they were forced to rush home to seek safety from the storm.

“I was just completely shocked that they would do that, and I was just looking at everybody and was like ‘look, we got to get to safety guys. Just don’t stand here,’” Maddox told local news. “They just disregarded us and disregarded our safety and they just

didn’t care.”

Townsend offered his perspective of the incident to local news station Oklahoma News 4.

Townsend said, “Being locked out during a tornado warning was kind of like a big kick in the teeth because you would at least expect to have some human decency.”

Another driver that was locked out of the door recounted the indifference with which workers were treated.

“I got right to the door, and one of the employees, I just kind of looked him in the face, and I was like, ‘These sirens are going off, my friend. Like, we need shelter,’” the driver told News 4. “And his eyes just got big, and my eyes got big. And he just pointed at the security guard and was like, ‘We do what he says.’ And I looked at the security guard, and he gave me a stare for a second.”

Moments later, the driver said a worker grabbed the door and shut it.

“I just turned around and was like, what in the world just happened?” the driver said. “Like, there is a tornado that can hit at any time, and we are here to fend for ourselves.”

“I couldn’t believe it,” another driver said. “My first thought after we got back into the car was that, you know, I guess they’re prioritizing their merchandise and their equipment over the lives of their workers.”

Fortunately for workers, the storm ultimately veered slightly north, and the tornado dissipated soon after.

“God forbid the tornado would have touched down and cars started flipping over and blocking paths to get in and out,” one driver said. “It would have just been a madhouse.”

In an attempt at damage control, Amazon spokesperson Sam Stephenson issued a statement

saying, “The health and safety of our employees and partners is our highest priority, and we take these matters very seriously. The actions taken here are unacceptable and did not follow our policies and procedures, and we’ve suspended the employees involved while we investigate the incident. We’re reaching out directly to everyone affected to apologize and let them know that we’re taking steps to ensure nothing like this happens again.”

In fact, Amazon possesses a terrible record of safety and hazard violations. Amazon warehouse workers are generally injured at roughly twice the average rate. In 2021, an OSHA analysis determined that Amazon’s injury rate of 6.5 per 100 employees was 71 percent higher than the rate for all other non-Amazon warehouses with over 1,000 employees. Musculoskeletal disorders are the most common injury, borne from the relentless focus on speed and quotas as high as 600 packages an hour for some roles.

Tuesday’s close brush with disaster could have turned out like two previous incidents where Amazon’s negligence during inclement weather led to the deaths of workers. A fulfillment center in Baltimore collapsed in November 2018 following severe storms, killing two workers. In December 2021, six workers died in Illinois after Amazon kept them on the job overnight as severe tornadoes ripped through the midwest. Management ignored extensive warnings of the danger days in advance of the tragedy, including from the National Weather Service and local news outlets.



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