

Amazon worker in employment limbo after seeking to take time off for an injury

By Nick Barrickman
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The *International Amazon Workers Voice* was recently contacted by an injured worker who has been given the run-around by the trillion dollar web commerce corporation after being injured on the job.

The worker, who will be given the pseudonym “Alex,” was injured a week earlier in a fall inside one of AmazonFresh’s food freezers. “I normally have to handle 8-10 bags of food at a time for customers,” Alex stated. Particular orders can contain all sorts of food combinations, including Coca Cola cans and other large items. “I spent 50 minutes inside these freezers,” they said. “The manager keeps telling us to go ‘faster.’”

This particular day, the floor was wet and frozen. “I fell and landed on my wrist,” said Alex, who noted that this was not the first time they had fallen in the freezer, where Amazon has known to confine its workers for hours at a time picking out items to ship.

Having injured their wrist, Alex sought out a medic. “I told the manager, they didn’t care.” They were told to go to the restroom and then return to the job. But with their hand swollen and painful, they could not work. After finding a sympathetic manager, they were given a form to fill out.

After finally getting permission to see the company’s in-house medic, Alex was placed in contact with a doctor of the company’s choosing. “I was told not to go to the hospital,” they said. Alex suspects that Amazon did this to avoid having to pay worker’s compensation. It was determined that the worker had fallen and broken their wrist.

The company’s doctor prescribed Alex be put on a job involving light duty work, taking co-workers’ temperatures at the front entrance as a part of Amazon’s safety precautions in response to the coronavirus. Fearing that their wrist would not heal

properly, Alex sought time off to rest.

That is when things became complicated. When they tried to report for work on Sunday of last week, their identification card was denied.

“They are playing games with me,” they said on the phone to the IAWV, clearly in an agitated state. Alex was told to call human resources, but the number would not connect. “I called 10 times, I could not get through.”

When Alex went back to work, the card was still deactivated. “They are giving me the run around, playing games,” they said again. “They want me to come to the warehouse” to get reactivated, “but I can’t even get in the door without the punch card.”

This is not the first time that the company’s automated human resource phone service has created bottlenecks and complications for workers simply seeking to straighten out minor administrative issues. According to *Bloomberg News*, “the design of Amazon’s HR department reflects the strengths and weaknesses of the company’s culture. It’s heavily automated, which helps Amazon grow quickly and restrain costs but these days leaves employees hitting dead ends with chatbots, smartphone apps and phone trees.”

The publication spoke to a number of Amazon employees who were “owed back pay for time spent on sick leave or in quarantine, have been scheduled for shifts while sick, or were denied leave despite providing documentation of conditions Amazon says should make them eligible to stay home without pay.”

The IAWV has reported on other occasions that workers were denied sick pay while being forced to quarantine after having likely contracted the deadly virus. In this case, Alex had a doctor’s confirmation of their injury and was still being denied the right to take

time off.

Amazon has made a literal killing off of the exploitation of its workers as millions have sheltered in place throughout the pandemic. As shelter-in-place orders went out during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the corporation has raked in billions in profit while going on a mass-hiring spree, beefing up its workforce to nearly 850,000 employees. These workers were hired and sent to work without even having proper personal protective equipment, in many cases.

The result has been that 1,600 workers at the company have fallen ill from the coronavirus, according to former Amazon employee Jana Jump, whose statistics of COVID-19 infections at Amazon warehouses throughout the United States and Canada are the only known record of COVID-19 infections at Amazon. Amazon will not publicly release its reported cases.

In a *60 Minutes* interview last month, Dave Clark, Amazon's head of operations in the United States, stated that the company's infection rate was "just under what the actual community infection rate is." Clark asserted that whatever infections were being transmitted at Amazon's warehouses were being brought into the facilities by the workers themselves, who were not practicing social distancing outside the job. When asked by an interviewer for the actual number of cases reported, Clark stated this information "isn't particularly useful."

It was reported on Tuesday in the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* that 88 Amazon workers had tested positive for the COVID-19 infection at the company's Shakopee warehouse. The infection of nearly 100 workers at the facility, which employs 1,000 workers, is the second highest rate discovered at an Amazon facility in the United States after the JFK8 facility in Queens, New York.

"I've worked there for more than a year, and now that I'm hurt and can't make them any money, they just want to get rid of me, like I'm garbage or something," Alex said. "They don't care about people," they said. "They always say that safety is their number one concern, but then, once you work for them, all you hear is 'faster!'"

Alex spoke about Amazon's insufficient social distancing precautions in regard to COVID-19. "It's impossible not to touch other people" and break social

distancing at Amazon, they said, concluding by denouncing the company, "Amazon is a scam!"

Last month, it was reported that the Amazon planted false news reports in over a dozen local media programs around the United States touting the company's fictional safety measures it had implemented during the pandemic. One news reporter in Wisconsin told CNBC "the Amazon segment stood out because it included a script, 'all the way down to the anchor toss.'"

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