Amazon dodged workplace safety regulators for years, investigation shows



A new investigation has claimed that Amazon attempted to dodge workplace safety regulators for years up until 2015. The investigation, which lead to a joint report published in *The Atlantic* and *Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting* is well worth reading in its entirety, and catalogs a series of safety failings across a number of Amazon's US warehouses, as well as the company's attempts to minimize the amount of injuries reported. In one case, the report alleges that investigators themselves attempted to minimize Amazon's liability for a death that occurred in one of its warehouses.

Here's how the report says Amazon tries to limit its employees' ability to request and share injury logs from its warehouses:

> *In at least a dozen cases, Amazon either ignored these employee requests or provided only partial records, in apparent violation of federal regulations. Amazon told some*

> *workers that they were entitled only to the records for the time period they worked there; an OSHA spokesperson, Kimberly Darby, said that's incorrect. And when Amazon did provide records, warehouse managers used identical language to call them confidential and request they be kept secret. Yet OSHA guidance says, and Darby confirmed, that employers are not allowed to restrict workers from sharing the records. Some workers said they felt intimidated by the notice, fearing they might get sued by Amazon for sharing the records with a news organization.*

However, even the records themselves may not have been accurate in past years. *The Atlantic* cites former safety managers who claim that the company had a policy of attempting to minimize the amount of injuries reported prior to 2015.

> *Several years ago, according to three of the former safety managers, Amazon had a policy for systematically hiding injuries. A former safety specialist in a warehouse confirmed their account. He said higher-ups instructed him to come up with justifications for not recording injuries that should have been counted by law.*

But the most damning section of the report alleges that one OSHA investigator, John Stallone, was told by his superior that his report into a death at an Amazon warehouse may need to be manipulated, in an attempt to shift the blame for the incident onto the employee. The investigator believed that Amazon had failed to provide sufficient training. Shortly afterwards, Stallone claims he was invited into a meeting with Indiana's Labor Commissioner and told to back off the case or risk jeopardizing Indiana's chances of being chosen as a location for Amazon's second headquarters.

> *Some days after the conference call with Amazon officials, Stallone said Indiana Labor Commissioner Rick Ruble pulled him into his office. The governor was there, too, standing by*

> *the commissioner's desk, according to Stallone.*
>
> *He recalled that Holcomb told him how much it would mean to Indiana if the state won the Amazon headquarters deal. Then, Stallone said, the commissioner told him to back off on the Amazon case—or resign.*
>
> *Stallone said he quit soon afterward. On December 6, 2017, Stallone sounded the alarm to a federal OSHA official. In an email he shared with Reveal, Stallone told the federal official that "someone higher than Director Alexander" wanted the Amazon case to go away "in the hopes it would keep Indianapolis in the running for their new HQ location."*

In the end, the official record essentially blames the employee for his own death. Amazon did not choose to locate a headquarters in Indiana.

The investigation is just one of a number of important pieces of reporting done into Amazon's warehouse conditions, and came out on the same day that a *Gizmodo* report highlighted dangerous conditions at one warehouse in New York. A story from *Mother Jones* published earlier this year prompted calls by Bernie Sanders for OSHA to launch an investigation into working conditions at Amazon's warehouses back in June.

Reveal and *The Atlantic's* latest investigation is an important read, not least because we're now well into Amazon's busiest season, which occurs in the run-up to Black Friday. In the same period last year, Amazon's records show that injuries spiked. *The Atlantic* says it's because of Amazon's mandatory 12-hour shifts and seasonal workers unaccustomed to the grind, Amazon says that injuries spike because it's taking on more employees.

You can check out the full report on both *The Atlantic* as well as *Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting*.

https://www.theverge.com/2019/11/26/20983452/amazon-workplace-safety-report-injuries-osha-investigation