

Amazon Reportedly Strikes a Deal With Unions to Reopen French Warehouses

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Amazon's six warehouses in France will reportedly reopen on May 19 with about one-third of staff after an April 14 court order forced them to shut down to reassess the risk of contagion among workers.

Reuters first reported the latest update, which cited an agreement signed by five French unions last week, following the initial complaint by a group of French trade unions that led to the court order. As a result of this agreement, Amazon is no longer limited to only shipping essential items like food and medical supplies.

Amazon did not respond to a request for comment.

In April, Amazon confirmed it was temporarily suspending operations at its French fulfillment centers. At the time, a spokesperson said Amazon was perplexed by the decision and had launched an appeal, but the 1 million euro per incident fine was too high to risk keeping the facilities open in the meantime.

Now, Reuters says Amazon's 10,600 French warehouse employees will return in phases through June 2. In the first, which begins Tuesday, a maximum of 50% of staff can return. Those who come to work will do so on a voluntary basis. Union officials told Reuters about 30% of staff said they'd be back on May 19. Under the terms of the deal, those volunteers will

get an additional 2 euros per hour until June 2 while remaining employees still receive their usual salary.

The deal also requires Amazon to stagger workdays by 15 minutes to create delays between shifts to minimize staff in changing rooms and entrances.

Reuters said French accounting services firm Progexa will review Amazon's new health measures.

Complaints about working conditions in Amazon warehouses have surfaced in the U.S., too, including warehouse worker-turned-advocate Chris Smalls, who has called on Amazon to shut down its U.S. warehouses to protect employees. So far, that has not happened. In response, the company is posting daily about its Covid-19 response efforts, which was echoed in CEO Jeff Bezos' 2019 shareholder letter.

Amazon's U.S. employees are not part of a union. A representative for the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union did not immediately respond to a request for comment about these developments in France.

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