

Amazon defends virus safety efforts amid fresh protests

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Amazon defended its COVID-19 safety efforts as it faced more protests about conditions in warehouses struggling to meet surging consumer demands

Amazon on Monday defended its coronavirus safety efforts as it faced renewed protests from warehouse workers, which have drawn support

from some of the US giant's technology employees.

Warehouse protest organizers, which include activist groups in several parts of the United States, said more than 50 employees walked out of an Amazon warehouse in Minnesota on Sunday and 2,000 signed a petition demanding that Amazon extend its paid leave policy set to be curtailed on April 30.

The latest actions stemmed from a recent decision by Amazon not to extend uncapped unpaid time off for distribution center employees facing increased workloads due to the coronavirus pandemic, organizers said.

"You basically have to chose between your job and getting your family sick," Rachel Belz, who works at an Amazon fulfillment center in New Jersey, said on a conference call with the press.

"What we need is for Amazon to not only be a little more humane, but to step up safety-wise and act like they care about us as a community."

Activists said workers in more than 130 Amazon facilities across the US have tested positive for COVID-19.

The protests drew support from Amazon's technology employees, more than 500 of whom participated in a "sick out" Friday in solidarity with the warehouse workers, according to organizers.

A group called Amazon Employees for Climate Justice said the solidarity action was aimed to protest Amazon's firing of people speaking out against the company.

Rachael Lighty, an Amazon spokesperson, said the accusations of failing to ramp up safety efforts were "simply unfounded."

"Nothing is more important than the safety of our teams," Lighty said in an emailed statement.

"Since the early days of this situation, we have worked closely with [health authorities](#) to proactively respond, ensuring we continue to serve customers while taking care of our associates and teams."

The company said employees required in the workplace have a range of paid and unpaid leave options and that anyone diagnosed with COVID-19 or placed into quarantine would get two weeks in addition to the standard five weeks paid leave.

"In addition, we are providing flexibility with leave of absence options, including expanding the policy to cover COVID-19 circumstances, such as high-risk individuals or school closures," Lighty said.

"We have taken extreme measures to keep people safe, tripling down on deep cleaning, procuring safety supplies that are available, and changing processes to ensure those in our buildings are keeping safe distances."

Lighty added that Amazon has extended its increased hourly pay through May 16 along with double overtime pay in the US and Canada.

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