

New York state sues Amazon over pandemic safety

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People protest working conditions outside of an Amazon warehouse fulfillment center on May 1, 2020 in the Staten Island borough of New York City

New York state sued Amazon Wednesday, claiming the e-commerce giant failed to adequately protect its warehouse workers during the

Covid-19 pandemic and then punished them if they complained.

The move comes days after Amazon filed its own legal action seeking to block New York Attorney General Letitia James from taking steps to enforce federal workplace safety regulations.

Wednesday's lawsuit in state court stems from an investigation begun in March 2020 following complaints about [employee](#) safety in Amazon facilities as the company ramped up operations to meet demands of locked-down consumers.

"While Amazon and its CEO made billions during this crisis, hardworking employees were forced to endure unsafe conditions and were retaliated against for rightfully voicing these concerns," James said in a statement.

"Since the pandemic began, it is clear that Amazon has valued profit over people and has failed to ensure the health and safety of its workers"

Amazon spokeswoman Kelly Nantel disputed the claims of the lawsuit.

"We care deeply about the health and safety of our employees, as demonstrated in our filing last week, and we don't believe the [attorney general](#)'s filing presents an accurate picture of Amazon's industry-leading response to the pandemic," the spokeswoman said in a statement.

The legal action follows a series of protests at Amazon facilities during the pandemic over safety and working conditions, including at Staten Island in New York City.

The company has argued it has invested billions in virus mitigation efforts.

James's investigation focused on two facilities—the Staten Island warehouse and a distribution center in Queens—with a combined workforce of more than 5,000.

The probe found that Amazon violated state law regarding cleaning and disinfection protocols and contact tracing, the attorney general said.

It also generally prevented workers from taking precautions to protect themselves from the risk of infection, the lawsuit claims.

Damages

The state alleges that Amazon was notified of at least 250 employees at Staten Island who had tested positive for Covid-19 or had symptoms, with more than 90 back in the warehouse within seven days of notifying Amazon.

"In all but seven of these instances, Amazon failed to close any portion of the facility after learning of the positive cases," according to the suit.

Amazon also failed to implement a proper program to identify workers who had come into close contact with those who had the virus, the suit adds.

The lawsuit by James says Amazon "unlawfully fired and disciplined employees that objected to Amazon's unsafe work conditions."

It demands that the company "take all affirmative steps" to protect workers from Covid-19 risks and to award back pay and damages to a [worker](#) who was fired from the Staten Island facility after complaining about working conditions.

The lawsuit also asks that Amazon pays emotional distress damages to

another employee issued with a written warning after complaining about conditions at the same warehouse.

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