

Amazon aims to cut its workplace injury rate by half

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Amazon, which has faced criticism for above-industry-average injury rates at its warehouses, said it is taking steps to halve the rate of workplace injuries in them by 2025.

The company is launching a suite of new programs, grouped under the

moniker "WorkingWell," designed to keep its nearly 1 million warehouse workers worldwide fit and limber, Amazon announced in a news release.

"The health and safety of our employees has always been Amazon's top priority," the company wrote in the release. "WorkingWell uses scientifically proven physical and mental activities, wellness exercises, and healthy eating habits to help recharge and reenergize the body, and ultimately reduce the risk of injury for operations employees."

Amazon's nationwide injury rate was roughly 7.7 injuries per 100 employees in 2019, nearly double the warehouse industry average, an investigation from Reveal for The Center for Investigative Reporting found. In some locations, the injury rate was even higher. Workers at Amazon's warehouse in DuPont, Pierce County, were injured at a rate more than five times higher than the warehouse industry average, the investigation found.

In his most recent letter to shareholders, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos committed the company to becoming "Earth's Best Employer and Earth's Safest Place to Work."

The new measures, though, sidestep an issue that some Amazon critics—and employees—have said is at the root of many injuries at Amazon's hundreds of warehouses: the company's focus on speed.

Warehouse workers unloading pallets, scanning merchandise and packing boxes are expected to work at a pace that some find unreasonable, previous media reports have highlighted. As Amazon began automating more warehouse functions, replacing workers with robots that never slowed or took breaks, injury rates rose, according to Reveal.

A [worker](#) at Amazon's Kent warehouse, who requested anonymity because he is not authorized to speak to the media, said injuries happen "a lot. All the time." He sees responsibility for injuries as shared between workers and Amazon: Not all workers lift packages appropriately or perform the stretching regimen Amazon recommends, but the company also expects workers to move at speeds that not everybody can sustain, he said.

"I've seen people come in here for their first day and quit at noon," he said, because the work is so strenuous.

The WorkingWell program focuses on lowering the incidence of injuries caused by repetitive motion in part by prompting employees to take short breaks and stretch. Amazon is also upping its education on workplace injury prevention and healthy eating, and rolling out a wellness-focused mobile app for employees. In pilot programs, WorkingWell helped decrease injuries like muscle sprains by 32% between 2019 and 2020, according to Amazon, though the company noted other company initiatives focused on lowering injury rates were running concurrently. Amazon did not immediately respond to a request for more details on those concurrent initiatives, or how much WorkingWell alone lowered injury rates.

The company is also expanding its network of health care services for employees, both at on-site clinics and what it calls Neighborhood Health Centers, offering off-site primary-care services to employees.

Amazon has been called out by federal workplace regulators for using its health centers to hide the extent of injuries at the [company's](#) warehouses. In 2019, the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration found that some of Amazon's on-site clinics were sending injured employees back to work without referring them to a physician for further medical care. Injuries must be reported to OSHA if the

[employee](#) sees a physician or needs workplace accommodation as a result of the [injury](#). Amazon did not immediately respond to questions about its standards for reporting injuries.

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