

Lawsuit against Amazon expected in connection with tornado that left 6 dead at Illinois warehouse

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A lawsuit against Amazon is expected to be filed Monday by the family of a delivery driver who was killed in December after a tornado hit an

Amazon warehouse downstate, according to a news release from the law firm retained by the family.

Six people who had been working at an Amazon warehouse in Edwardsville died following the Dec. 10 storm, which left dozens dead across multiple states. Among them was independent contractor Austin McEwen, 26, who like other workers was allegedly required to work under conditions management knew to be unsafe, according to the news release. The facility had inadequate emergency plans and no basement shelter, the [lawsuit](#) contends, and McEwen and others who died were told to shelter in a bathroom during the storm.

A spokeswoman for Amazon disputed those claims in a statement, saying members of a local team "worked to move people to safety as quickly as possible."

The lawsuit was expected to be the first filed against Amazon in connection with the deaths, according to Clifford Law Offices, the Chicago-based firm representing McEwen's family.

"It appears that holiday profits took precedence over safety," said the family's attorney, Jack Casciato, according to the news release.

In a statement, Kelly Nantel, a spokeswoman for Amazon, said the lawsuit "misunderstands key facts." The building was new and up to code, Nantel said, and "local teams" were following [weather conditions](#) at the time of the storm.

"Severe weather watches are common in this part of the country, and while precautions are taken, are not cause for most businesses to close down," Nantel said. "We believe our team did the right thing as soon as a warning was issued, and they worked to move people to safety as quickly as possible."

Amazon representatives previously have said its [emergency response](#), including in the event of severe weather, is part of training for warehouse employees. Amazon directs employees to shelter during [tornadoes](#), representatives said last month, but the company declined to specifically state when employees at the Edwardsville facility were warned about the threat.

Amazon recently has opened warehouses across the south suburbs, in Markham, Matteson and University Park.

According to law enforcement officials in December, the other victims at the Amazon warehouse were Deandre Morrow, 28, and Etheria Hebb, 34, both of St. Louis; and Illinois residents Kevin Dickey, 62, of Carlyle; Clayton Lynn Cope, 29, of Alton; and Larry Virden, 46, of Collinsville.

The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration last month opened an investigation into the facility's collapse, and has six months to complete it, OSHA officials said at the time.

Clifford Law Offices planned to file the lawsuit and hold a virtual news conference Monday.

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