

Feds have 'concerns,' but no punishment, for Amazon after deadly warehouse collapse in tornado

April 27 2022, by Celina Tebor



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A federal agency's inspection of an Illinois Amazon warehouse facility where six people died last year during a tornado "raised concerns" about employee safety, but the regulatory agency stopped short of issuing any fines or penalties against the e-commerce giant.

Six people were killed last December when a tornado smashed through the massive Amazon warehouse in Edwardsville, Illinois. The 11-inch concrete walls collapsed and the 40-foot roof caved in, destroying a football-field section of the 1 million square foot building.

In a "Hazard Alert Letter" to Amazon published Tuesday, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration wrote that its inspection of the facility "raised concerns about the potential risk to employees during [severe weather](#) emergencies."

In interviews with Amazon and [contract workers](#), OSHA officials found that some employees couldn't remember ever participating in severe weather or [shelter](#)-in-place drills, and some didn't know where the designated warehouse shelter was.

Kelly Nantel, an Amazon spokesperson, however, said employees receive emergency response training, which is "reinforced throughout the year."

The warehouse's tornado shelter was in the northern restroom, but some employees instead took shelter in the southern restroom. All of those who were injured or died were in the bathroom on the southern side of the warehouse.

Amazon had posted evacuation maps at the facility showing the location of the designated shelter, but officials found Amazon's written emergency action plan did not "specifically identify" the shelter's location in the warehouse.

Additionally, the emergency action plan "was not customized with specific instructions" for hazards expected at the Edwardsville site. Amazon managers were also supposed to use a megaphone to tell employees to take shelter, but it was locked in a cage and not accessible, the letter said.

The House Committee of Oversight and Reform launched an investigation into Amazon's labor practices on April 1 following the warehouse collapse.

"During the recent tornado strikes in Edwardsville, Illinois, six workers died after Amazon reportedly threatened employees and contractors with termination if they left work and sought safety during the dangerous storm," members of the committee wrote in a statement.

One Amazon [employee](#) who died in the warehouse collapse texted his girlfriend, "Amazon won't let us leave," before his death, The Intercept reported.

OSHA's letter did not address when Amazon employees were allowed to leave the facility during the storm.

The regulatory agency listed a number of steps Amazon could "voluntarily take" to reduce its employees' exposure to unsafe conditions during weather emergencies in the letter, but didn't levy any fines or punishments against the Seattle-based company.

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