

Amazon to begin locking out some laid-off employees on Wednesday

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Amazon is locking some laid-off employees out of its offices and their company-issued laptops on Wednesday, about a week after the company started notifying workers that their positions were being cut.

Amazon told laid-off employees from the division that works on the Alexa virtual assistant to collect their belongings, pack up company-issued laptops and prototypes, and download Amazon's email and messaging service on their personal devices by 5 p.m. Wednesday, according to an email viewed by The Seattle Times.

Amazon began notifying employees they had lost their jobs last Tuesday, the first round in a string of layoffs that Amazon expects will last into 2023 and affect around 10,000 jobs. That number is fluid, as team leaders continue to make decisions, CEO Andy Jassy told employees last week.

It's still not clear how Amazon's job cuts will impact its Puget Sound headquarters but the losses are part of a wave of layoffs sweeping the tech industry and the state. Washington's information sector shed 5,900 jobs in October, according to a report from the Employment Security Department. With the most recent layoff announcements, it's set to lose up to 18,000 tech or tech-related jobs over barely two months.

Amazon is making cuts across several divisions, including devices, books, human resources and stores. The devices group includes Amazon's voice assistant Alexa, its health device Halo and its home robot Astro, as well as Kindle, smart home products and the Echo speaker. Stores covers most of Amazon's consumer business, including online and physical stores, the marketplace for third-party sellers and Prime.

Laid-off employees can still use personal devices to access company email, Amazon's communication platform Chime and its AtoZ app, which provides resources on pay, benefits and internal job openings. That's important for laid-off workers because Amazon has given them 60 days to search for new roles inside the company. Laid-off workers will lose access to Slack, an instant messaging system.

"As you know, for the next few months, we are focused on supporting you in your efforts to find your next role, either internally at Amazon or externally," the email read. "Since you are not expected to work during this time period, we will be making some changes to your corporate access."

In response to questions about the lockout announcement, Amazon said Monday it is working to support those who are affected and help them find new roles, including by ensuring they can access resources relevant to internal job searches. The timeline for access changes varies, Amazon said.

The company confirmed the layoffs last Wednesday, a day after it started making cuts. Jassy told employees Thursday that the cuts will roll into 2023—leaving some Amazon employees to wait until next year to learn if their jobs are safe.

"Our annual planning process extends into the new year, which means there will be more role reductions as leaders continue to make adjustments," Jassy wrote in a note to employees.

That news left employees scrambling to grasp what the next few months could look like, from questioning whether they could close on a new home to worrying about finding another job before their Amazon-sponsored work visa expires.

"How can we expect to be 'Earth's Greatest Employer' if literally everyone in the company is trying to figure out if they will be keeping their jobs?" one employee asked in an internal Slack channel, #layoff-discussion, viewed by The Seattle Times.

Some workers got an answer quickly when a 15-minute meeting with their manager and a representative from human resources appeared on

their calendars last Tuesday. Those workers were told they had 60 days to find a new job, inside Amazon or externally, according to interviews with former employees.

But, in November, Amazon froze hiring for corporate roles "for the next few months."

An employee who was recently laid off from Amazon's devices organization, and asked to remain anonymous because she is searching for a new role, said the several internal roles she has applied for led to dead ends.

Some managers declined her request for an informational interview because her skills didn't align with the role on offer. Most said there were simply too many applicants to schedule time for them all, or cited the hiring freeze as a reason to say no.

Losing access to resources like Slack and a company laptop feels like "salt in the wound," that employee said, because it adds an extra layer of complexity to the job search.

That [employee](#), who is 39, and from Federal Way, Washington, said her team had an on-site meeting in August where managers first mentioned that the group had gotten a "little bloated" and that Amazon would be looking for ways to "trim the fat." But, leadership went out of its way to assure employees they were trying hard to avoid layoffs.

Now, she says it's not clear how Amazon decided whom to cut and whom to keep. She and her co-workers are "hungry for answers," she said.

"We talk about being a data-driven company and it's like, 'Give us the breakdown so we can see what the competition is that we're up against

[for new roles] and give us some reason,' " she said.

"I have to wonder, why me?" she continued. "Everyone says it's not my performance, but I want someone who had to actually make that decision answer for it."

Amazon has maintained that it will help laid-off workers find new jobs. Describing what steps employees should take before losing access to corporate devices and buildings, the company wrote to employees "our focus is on helping make these steps as seamless as possible so you can focus on your job search."

Almost a week since Amazon began scheduling meetings to discuss layoffs, some employees say it's still unclear what their severance package will look like. Employees in the human resources division have been offered voluntary buyouts.

Amazon has declined to share how the job cuts will impact its Puget Sound workforce, which includes about 75,000 people across offices in Seattle, Bellevue and Redmond, fulfillment centers in Kent, Sumner, Dupont and an air hub in SeaTac.

The company has not yet filed any information with Washington's Employment Security Department, which records job losses in the state.

If the layoffs impact 10,000 workers, Amazon would shed roughly 3% of its corporate employees and less than 1% of its global workforce of more than 1.5 million, which is primarily composed of hourly workers.

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