

Sanders launches Senate probe into Amazon's safety practices and asks workers to share stories

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A truck arrives at the Amazon warehouse facility, in the Staten Island borough of New York, April 1, 2022. Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders has opened a Senate investigation into Amazon's warehouse safety practices, the latest in a series of probes he's initiated against big corporations in his role as chairman of a committee that oversees health and labor issues. Credit: AP Photo/Eduardo Munoz Alvarez, File

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders has opened a Senate investigation into Amazon's warehouse safety practices, the latest in a series of probes he's initiated against big corporations in his role as chairman of a committee that oversees health and labor issues.

Sanders, who has run for president twice and spent a political lifetime fighting corporations and monied interests over policies that he believes hurt the working class, [sent a letter](#) to Amazon CEO Andy Jassy on Tuesday accusing the e-commerce giant of "egregious health and safety violations."

"The company's quest for profits at all costs has led to unsafe physical environments, intense pressure to work at unsustainable rates, and inadequate medical attention for tens of thousands of Amazon workers every year," Sanders, who chairs the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, wrote in the letter.

The 81-year-old progressive senator also accused the company, which operates a vast network of warehouses across the country, of failing to adopt "adequate worker protections" because of a corporate culture that treats workers as disposable.

Amazon spokesperson Steve Kelly said Tuesday morning the company had received Sanders' letter and was in the early stages of reviewing it. Later in the day, Kelly said the company strongly disagreed with the senator's assertions.

"We take the safety and health of our employees very seriously," Kelly said. "There will always be ways to improve, but we're proud of the progress we've made, which includes a 23% reduction in recordable injuries across our U.S. operations since 2019."

Kelly also noted the company has invested more than \$1 billion into safety initiatives in the last four years and will continue investing in this area.

Injuries at Amazon have typically been higher compared with its peers in the industry, which critics and labor safety experts blame on the company's fast-paced warehouses that track productivity and allow customers to get their packages quickly. Labor groups have seized on the issue in an effort to organize workers, some of which has borne fruit but hasn't led to a massive wave of unionization.

In his letter, Sanders pointed to citations Amazon has received from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration for workplace safety violations, which the company says it has appealed. He also pointed out another investigation by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York into what that office called "possible fraudulent conduct" by Amazon designed to hide injuries from OSHA and others.

According to the company, injuries across its U.S. operations—which include lower back injuries, strains and sprains—took a slight dip last year, clocking in at 6.7% per 200,000 working hours. But those figures were still higher compared to 2020.

In his letter, Sanders also cited a report from a coalition of three labor unions, which said serious injuries at Amazon were more than double the rest of the warehouse sector last year. Amazon disputes some of the findings.

"There will always be ways for our critics to splice data to suit their narrative, but the fact is, we've made progress and our numbers clearly show it," Kelly said.

The investigation into Amazon follows a similar probe from the Senate

committee into Starbucks and pharmaceutical giant Moderna. As part of the Amazon investigation, the committee is asking Amazon workers to submit stories about their time at the company through a [website](#). The committee says the submissions will remain confidential.

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