

Amazon fined again by WA safety regulators over warehouse work

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Washington's Department of Labor and Industries has cited a fourth Amazon warehouse, accusing the company of knowingly putting workers at risk of injury.

L&I issued \$85,800 in fines to Amazon after an inspection of the company's Spokane-area fulfillment center, which the department says has the highest injury rate of any Amazon warehouse in the state. The department said Amazon required employees to work at such a fast pace that it put them at risk of work-related musculoskeletal disorders, or strains, sprains and tears that are often caused by repetitive motions.

In the three years since the facility opened, [workers](#) there filed more than 400 workers' compensation claims for work-related musculoskeletal disorders, reported L&I, which administers the state workers' compensation insurance system.

The fines, announced Tuesday, mark the fifth time L&I has cited Amazon for unsafe working conditions in the last few years. Because it has cited Amazon for similar violations at other facilities in Washington—in Sumner, Kent and DuPont, Pierce County—L&I issued a "willful" citation with a higher penalty for the Spokane facility.

Regulators with the state Department of Labor and Industries have fined Amazon five times since 2021 following allegations that the company put workers at risk of injury. The most recent citation follows an inspection of the Spokane fulfillment center.

"Perhaps more than any other company, Amazon has the means and the know-how to invest in solutions that keep their workers safe," Craig Blackwood, the assistant director for L&I's Division of Occupational Safety and Health, said in a statement.

Amazon spokesperson Maureen Lynch Vogel said the company disagrees with the allegations and the "willful" characterization. Amazon has appealed the previous four citations and plans to appeal the latest one as well.

"Once again, L&I is relying on prior citations we have challenged ... as a basis for alleging that we willfully exposed employees to ergonomic hazards. That is categorically false," Vogel said. "We look forward to a full and fair hearing on the citations we've already challenged because the fact is, we're making measurable progress."

Vogel said Amazon has improved its recordable incident rate—a measure of how often an injury or illness occurs at work—in the U.S. by 23% since 2019.

Amazon and L&I went to trial in July over the pending appeals from the previous four citations. During the trial, which is set to last through September, a judge from the Board of Industrial Insurance Appeals will determine if Amazon has violated state law by failing to create a safe working environment.

If the judge rules in favor of L&I, Amazon will have to make changes to its warehouse operations, following suggestions from the department. If Amazon prevails, state regulators' hands may be tied.

Federal workplace safety regulators from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Department of Justice, as well as a U.S. Senate committee, are also investigating Amazon facilities around the country. OSHA has cited some Amazon facilities for failing to properly record work-related injuries, not providing adequate medical treatment to injured workers and failing to keep workers safe.

Amazon disputes those allegations, reiterating that it has invested millions in a "robust safety program" to protect workers. Accurate record keeping is an element of that program, the company said. It maintains that the government's allegations do not reflect the reality of safety at its warehouses.

While the injury rate at Amazon warehouses has declined, the extent of that decline and how the company compares with the rest of the industry is hotly contested. A coalition of labor unions that analyzed 2022 regulatory data found the overall injury rate at Amazon was 7 injuries per 100 workers in 2022, 70% higher than the rate at non-Amazon warehouses.

Amazon disputes that assertion, and says the unions' comparison to others in the industry is flawed. Amazon found in its own analysis, which used a different [injury](#) rate measure, that rates at U.S. facilities fell to 6.7 injuries per 200,000 working hours in 2022.

Amazon says it has invested in technology, vehicle safety controls and engineered solutions to reduce risk for employees. It plans to spend \$550 million in safety-related projects across its fulfillment, freight and delivery networks this year.

In Spokane, L&I also cited Amazon for noise levels that are too high when workers are not wearing appropriate hearing protection.

Amazon said it disagrees with that characterization.

The company has 15 days from the date of the citation to file an appeal.

The money from the fine would go in the workers' compensation supplemental pension fund, to help workers and families of those who have died on the job, according to L&I.

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