

Amazon workers in Minnesota plan 6-hour strike during Prime Day event

July 9 2019, by Dee Depass, Star Tribune (Minneapolis)



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

A worker advocacy group said 100 Amazon warehouse workers in Shakopee, Minn., plan to strike for six hours on the e-commerce giant's Prime Day next week, in an effort to demand better work conditions.

The work stoppage is planned from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. July 15—the first day of Amazon's popular "Prime" online sales event.

A "community rally" including workers, supporters and elected officials is also planned outside Amazon's warehouse in Shakopee. Amazon's 885,000-square-foot fulfillment center employs more than 1,500 workers.

The participating Minnesota workers, most of them Somali and East African immigrants, will join co-workers from Seattle in the work stoppage, which is designed to disrupt Amazon's biggest shopping days of the year. The Prime Day sales event offers steep discounts to fee-paying Prime members and this year will be held July 15-16.

Amazon officials said they do not expect disruptions next week as a result of what is planned by workers in Shakopee. A spokesperson noted that most Shakopee workers will not strike and that other fulfillment centers across the country stand ready to ensure a smooth workflow.

Officials from the [worker](#) advocacy group Awood Center in Minneapolis announced the strike plans on Monday and said they expect "more than 100 workers to attend."

Awood Executive Director Abdi Muse said in a statement that the work stoppage will be part of employees' continued push to force "the corporate giant to provide safe & reliable jobs, increase respect and opportunities for advancement for the predominantly East African workforce."

Striking workers are demanding the right to organize, and to work at normal speeds. They also are calling on Amazon to address critical issues like climate change, organizers said. Minnesota employees are expected to be joined by several Amazon technology workers from Seattle who have been lobbying the company to improve its environmental efforts and to do more to fight climate change.

Muse said in an interview Monday that the speed at which employees are required to work is not safe. "As Amazon continues to speed up work and demand more from warehouse workers, it is hard for everyone. People are getting hurt or quitting because they are afraid," Muse said. "The biggest concern is over the production rate. (They) have to produce at such a rate each hour that is so intense. They have to work faster and faster. And if they go (to take) a break their production history goes down," and they are threatened with being fired.

Muse added that it is particularly hard "for people who practice the Muslim faith to keep up with the backbreaking work when you aren't eating during Ramadan. These jobs need to be well paid but also need to be ones where people aren't afraid to take a short break so they don't get hurt."

Amazon spokeswoman Brenda Alfred called the allegations false.

"Amazon's work culture is one that strives to ensure fair and safe working conditions," Alfred said in an e-mail to the Star Tribune. "The fact is Amazon offers already what this outside organization is asking for. We provide great employment opportunities with excellent pay—ranging from \$16.25-\$20.80 an hour, and comprehensive benefits including health care, up to 20 weeks parental leave, paid education, promotional opportunities, and more. ."

She invited those who question the company's work conditions to "see

for themselves by taking a tour of the facility."

In recent years, tensions between Amazon and its immigrant Minnesota workforce have developed. About one-third of the 1,500 workers at its Shakopee fulfillment center are estimated to be of East African descent. Meetings between Amazon managers in Minnesota and their workers took place during most of last year with mixed results.

In December, 100 Amazon employees and supporters protested outside the Shakopee warehouse, alleging unequal wages, work conditions that induced miscarriages and retaliation against those who complained. In past interviews, company officials denied the complaints.

In May 2019, three Somali-American female employees in Shakopee filed a complaint with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission accusing Amazon of violating their civil rights by passing over East African workers for promotion and failing to accommodate Muslim employees' religious needs, especially during Ramadan. The complaint said the retail giant regularly retaliated against workers who protested workplace discrimination.

©2019 Star Tribune (Minneapolis)
Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: Amazon workers in Minnesota plan 6-hour strike during Prime Day event (2019, July 9) retrieved 29 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2019-07-amazon-workers-minnesota-hour-prime.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--