

Union advocate 'salts' quietly take jobs inside NC Amazon warehouse

May 6 2024, by Brian Gordon, The News & Observer



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Around 5,000 people work at RDU1, Amazon's sprawling four-floor fulfillment center in the Wake County town of Garner. A few clock in harboring covert intentions.

Carolina Amazonians United for Solidarity and Empowerment, or C.A.U.S.E., launched in early 2022 to unionize the facility's workforce. Amazon is the nation's second-largest private employer and no fan of unions. North Carolina is the nation's second-least unionized state and lacks a robust organizing track record.

Any [union](#) campaign at RDU1 was always going to be a process. So, when people approach C.A.U.S.E. about how to contribute, group organizers have suggested some take jobs there. This is a common, if controversial, organizing tactic known as salting, in which pro-labor advocates get hired at workplaces they wish to unionize. These workers, known as salts, complete shifts alongside colleagues while accessing spaces regular organizers can't.

"We've supported some people who are inside now that are salts," said Adam Stromme of C.A.U.S.E.

At some workplaces, salts are paid organizers who get recruited and trained by large unions to cultivate support. But at RDU1, Stromme insists his independent organizing group doesn't have the desire or budget to coordinate a formal salting campaign.

"The initiative comes from outside to C.A.U.S.E., not from C.A.U.S.E. to other people," Stromme said.

The 100-year-old strategy can be a sensitive topic. Organizers worry management will portray it as a sign of an inorganic campaign. And employers tend to despise salts. Sean Redmond of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce deemed salting a "potentially destructive tactic," in a 2022

post. This March, a Republican U.S. representative proposed a bill that would make employers more aware of salts.

"That's one of the issues employers have raised, that it's a conflict of interest," said Eric Fink, a labor law professor at Elon University. But as Fink pointed out, salting is a federally protected labor activity; in 1995, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the practice, even when job applicants are also paid by a union.

"You take the job, you have to do the work," Stromme said. "It makes no difference what's in their head. You're still scanning packages at the same rate as any other worker."

Still, Stromme said it's best to hide the existence of salts from employers whenever possible. Advocates label Amazon a union buster, and the company faced 240 open or settled unfair labor practice charges at the end of last year, according to the National Labor Relations Board, including accusations of illegal behavior around union elections. Just this week, an NLRB judge found Amazon CEO Andy Jassy had violated federal labor law when he said workers would be "better off" without a union.

In February, Amazon argued the NLRB is unconstitutional.

No union election appears imminent at RDU1. Before calling for a vote, organizers must obtain union authorization cards from at least 30% of employees. In practice, the necessary percentage tends to surpass 50% before unions will ask the National Labor Relations Board for an election.

Stromme said C.A.U.S.E. isn't ready to collect cards. For now, the group is power mapping the 2 million-square-foot complex to see where support is growing and stagnating. The organization believes having a

federally recognized union can deliver its demands for \$30-an-hour wage for entry-level employees, 180 hours of personal time off, paid [sick leave](#), and a one-hour lunch break (compared to the current 30 minutes.)

If salts pitch in to achieve these goals, C.A.U.S.E. won't mind.

In a statement to the N&O, Amazon spokesperson Eileen Hards said, "Our employees have the choice of whether or not to join a union. They always have. We favor opportunities for each person to be respected and valued as an individual, and to have their unique voice heard by working directly with our team. The fact is, Amazon already offers what many unions are requesting: industry-leading pay, [health benefits](#) on day one, and opportunities for career growth."

2024 The News & Observer. Distributed at Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: Union advocate 'salts' quietly take jobs inside NC Amazon warehouse (2024, May 6) retrieved 29 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-05-union-advocate-salts-quietly-jobs.html>

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.