

Amazon warehouse workers plan another protest in Staten Island

Monday's demonstration follows the firing of strike organizer Christian Smalls last week.

Workers at Amazon's warehouse in Staten Island, New York, are holding another demonstration Monday to protest their working conditions during the coronavirus pandemic.

The protest is the second in as two weeks at this warehouse, called JFK8. The location gained national attention last week when strike organizer Christian Smalls was fired the same day as the previous demonstration. Amazon said he violated a company-mandated quarantine order when he attended last week's rally.

Amazon has been facing growing pressure over its handling of the coronavirus crisis, with elected officials, advocacy groups and Amazon employees calling for better protections. The Staten Island workers are among a handful of Amazon employee groups pressing the company for better pay, more paid time off and more health measures during the pandemic.

Last week, Amazon worker demonstrations also took place in Chicago and Detroit, while Queens, New York, warehouse workers have been pushing for changes too. Workers at Whole Foods, which is owned by Amazon, staged their own "sickout" last week.

The situation has become more heated as a growing list of Amazon facility have had confirmed cases of coronavirus and more workers at the Staten Island facility have tested positive.



Amazon has talked up its dozens of new health and safety protocols to protect its employees, including increased cleanings and staggered start times to encourage social distancing. On Thursday, Amazon said it will soon start temperature checks and provide face masks in US facilities.

"Like all businesses grappling with the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, we are working hard to keep employees safe while serving communities and the most vulnerable," Amazon spokeswoman Rachael Lighty said in a statement Monday. "We have taken extreme measures to keep people safe, tripling down on deep cleaning, procuring safety supplies that are available and changing processes to ensure those in our buildings are keeping safe distances."

Demonstrators are calling for a full shutdown of the Staten Island warehouse "for cleaning and sanitation for as long as necessary for professional sanitization, with 100% pay for all employees affected by the closure," according to an email from organizers sent out Monday morning.

Amazon said only 15 employees attended last week's demonstration in Staten Island, while organizers said the number was around 60. About 5,000 people work in the facility.

The series of demonstrations comes after workers at the Staten Island facility attempted to unionize in 2018. No Amazon employees in the US are unionized.

The second strike is scheduled for 11:30 a.m. local time, with Amazon employees joined by supporters from advocacy groups Make the Road New York, New York Communities for Change and United for Respect.

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