

Senate Select Committee on Job Security

Answers to questions on notice

Public hearing – 10 June 2021

Question 1:

Senator SMALL: That sounds stunningly reminiscent of statements made by union leaders here in Australia, actually: 'If you play by the rules you don't win, so we don't play by the rules.' But I digress. How long do you think it will take to get a resolution at the National Labor Relations Board? I'm running out of time, but it would be good to know whether or not that particular issue would be resolved before this committee has to issue its final report and recommendations to the Australian parliament.

Mr Ben: The appeal process has been ongoing in the last few weeks. I apologise for not being able to put a more specific time line on it, but I believe it is expected in the next couple of months or weeks. I'm not sure of the time line of your committee, but a result is expected soon. I believe the process is coming to a conclusion or may have come to a conclusion relatively recently.

Senator SMALL: Brilliant. We're due to report in November, so, on notice, if anything does come to fruition that you'd be able to provide, that would also be very helpful. Thanks very much for your time.

CHAIR: You briefly gave some evidence there regarding the National Labor Relations Board and 23 different objections to the conduct of the ballot. Can you talk us through some of the ways Amazon tried to prevent the conduct of that ballot?

Answer:

A response to the election timeline question from Senator Small:
The RWDSU is awaiting a decision from the National Labor Relations Board.

Question 2:

Mr Ben: Specifically on the injury question, there's a recent report that's been released by the Strategic Organizing Centre. That has involvement of unions, but the data they're using has been accessed via OSHA, which is the US version of Safe Work. In terms of the injuries, there are obviously universities who have put out reports as well. When I mentioned the 100 per cent annual turnover rate, that's specifically in relation to our own union's experience at the Bessemer facility, having spoken to the bargaining unit extensively over the election period. I can give another number: we've estimated that, in the last five months alone, around 2,000 workers have left that warehouse—and there are around 5,800 workers employed there.

...

Mr Ben: At the moment I've got the number for the Bessemer site, but I think one of the reasons that it would be reasonable to apply that to facilities throughout the country is the fact that, having spoken to hundreds, thousands, of workers at that site, we know that one of the key reasons for turnover is workers getting injured. In that recent report I cited earlier, from the Strategic Organizing Centre, they show that the serious injury rate at Amazon warehouses is more than double the rate in comparable warehousing facilities. So I think if you were to apply the injury rate, which is national, across the facilities, that alone would be a huge factor towards the turnover.

Senator SMALL: On notice, would you be able to provide a copy of that report to the committee? I think it would be really helpful if you could email that through so we can have a look at that here.

Mr Ben: Sure.

Answer: Report provided – extract and link:

Primed for Pain:

Amazon's Epidemic of Workplace Injuries

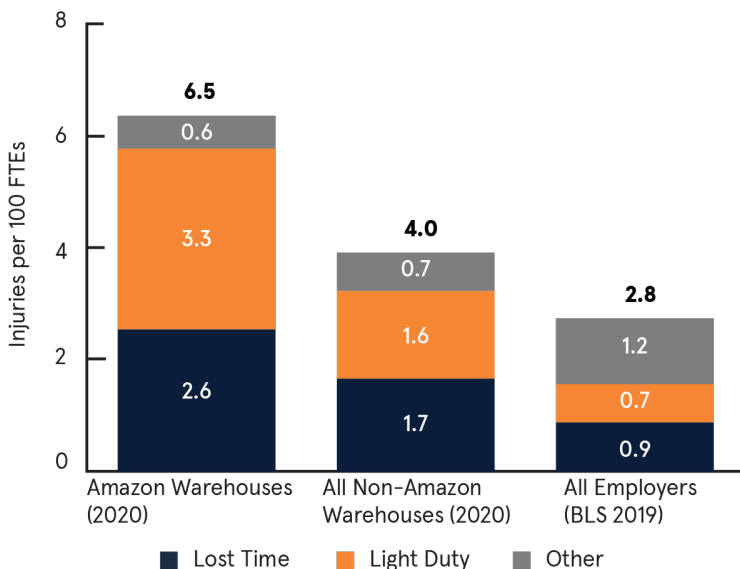
As the largest e-commerce retailer in the US, Amazon took advantage of the massive shift to online shopping during the COVID-19 pandemic and saw its US sales increase 39 percent during 2020. The company's size and influence has expanded at an extraordinary pace. In the ten years between 2010 and 2020, Amazon's workforce grew from 33,700 to nearly 1.3 million and its annual net income increased from \$1.1 billion to \$21.3 billion.

The company's obsession with speed has come at a huge cost for Amazon's workforce. For more than a decade, Amazon has made headlines for dangerous health and safety conditions in its facilities. In 2019, multiple groups of researchers and journalists analyzed standardized records of worker injuries maintained at Amazon facilities. They found that Amazon's injury rates were over double the injury rate in the notoriously hazardous general warehousing industry.

Comparing Amazon Injury Rates With Other Employers

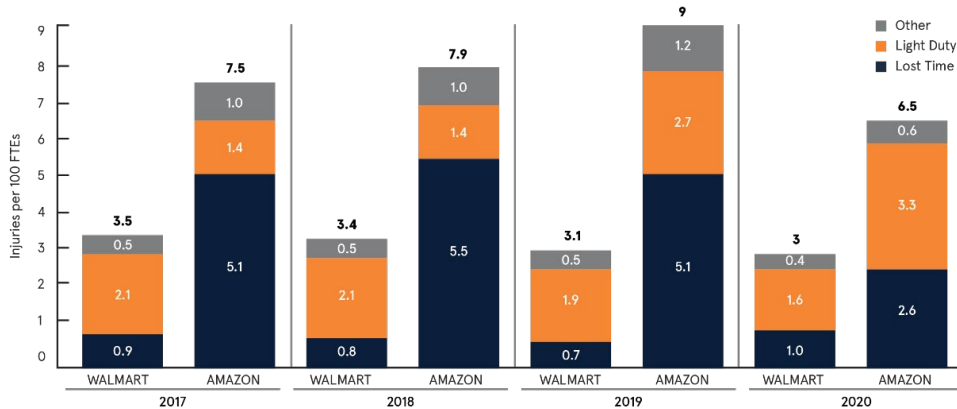
Workers at Amazon warehouses are not only injured more frequently than in non-Amazon warehouses, they are also injured more severely. In 2020, for every 100 Amazon warehouse workers there were 5.9 serious injuries requiring the worker to either miss work entirely (lost time) or be placed on light or restricted duty (light duty). This rate is nearly 80 percent higher than the serious injury rate for all other employers in the warehousing industry in 2020 (3.3). Amazon workers who were injured at work also took longer than other workers in the warehousing industry to recover. In 2020 Amazon workers who experienced lost-time injuries were forced off work for an average of 46.3 days – more than a month and a half. That is a week longer than the average recovery time for workers injured in the general warehouse industry and more than two weeks longer than the recovery time for the average worker who suffered a lost time injury.

FIGURE 1: Injury Rates at Amazon and Other Employers, by Injury Category, 2020



In addition to comparing Amazon’s injury rates with those of the general warehouse industry, SOC’s analysis looked at Amazon’s injury rates in comparison with Walmart, Amazon’s strongest competitor in retail e-commerce. In all four years covered by this analysis, SOC’s analysis found that Amazon warehouses were far more dangerous than Walmart’s. In 2020, Amazon’s overall warehouse injury rate (6.5/100 FTEs) was over twice that of Walmart (3.0), while Amazon’s severe injury rate (2.6) was more than two-and-a-half times Walmart’s (1.0). Figure 2, below, breaks down the overall injury rates at each company’s warehouses by injury type.

FIGURE 2: Warehouse injury rates by type, Walmart and Amazon, 2017-2020



- The link to the report requested by Senator Small: [https://thesoc.org/amazon-primed-for-pain/#:~:text=In%202020%2C%20for%20every%20100,restricted%20duty%20\(light%20duty\).&text=Amazon%20workers%20who%20were%20injured,the%20warehousing%20industry%20to%20recover.](https://thesoc.org/amazon-primed-for-pain/#:~:text=In%202020%2C%20for%20every%20100,restricted%20duty%20(light%20duty).&text=Amazon%20workers%20who%20were%20injured,the%20warehousing%20industry%20to%20recover.)