

US regulators launch investigation into worker death at Amazon warehouse

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Author: Michael Sainato

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US regulators have launched an investigation into the death of a 20-year-old worker at an Amazon warehouse in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Caes Gruesbeck was killed on 9 May while working during his shift at the FWA4 warehouse. Gruesbeck was trying to fix a jam on an overhead conveyor when his head was struck. An Allen County coroner report ruled the fatality was caused by blunt-force trauma. Workers say the incident occurred while Gruesbeck was operating a one-man lift. A spokesperson for Amazon said the worker struck his head on an overhead conveyance system while driving the one-man lift underneath it. The worker was wearing proper personal protective equipment, including a hard hat, and fall protection. After the incident, Amazon sent workers home with pay and canceled upcoming shifts before reopening the warehouse on 12 May. The Indiana Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Osha) has launched an investigation in response to the incident. In 2022, Osha conducted over 1,100 fatality or catastrophe investigations into workplaces. Osha and the Department of Justice are currently engaged in investigations at numerous Amazon warehouses over worker safety issues. An Amazon employee claimed management had warned workers about talking to the media about the incident. "They're saying anyone who talks will lose their job," they said. Amazon insisted that workers are permitted to speak to the media without retaliation. The worker also criticized the safety conditions at the site in the lead-up to the incident. "The one-man lift should not have been under a conveyor that low," the worker said, explaining that one-man lifts are used by workers to clear packages on conveyor belts at the warehouse when they get stuck. "Tier 1 employees should not be operating the one-man lifts. They didn't when we launched the building, only RME was allowed to operate them," they added, referring to reliability maintenance engineering workers who maintain equipment used at the warehouse. "We all have a lot of questions. Several people are still traumatized. No one wants to lose their job, but we are all realizing we work for a monster." An Amazon spokesperson, Maureen Vogel, said in response to the criticisms: "Employees who are fully trained, as this individual was, have been able to operate one-man lifts." Another worker at the site criticized Amazon for not informing employees about the incident in its communications with workers telling them not to show up for the night shift because the warehouse was closed. "I feel like the company just doesn't care and should have at least let us know what was going on," the worker said. "I've seen a lot of safety hazards in that facility and have myself been put in dangerous situations by supervisors over my shift." "It's very traumatizing," said another worker at the warehouse who was working when the incident occurred. Workers requested to remain anonymous for fear of retaliation. "They made an announcement at the end of lunch and sent everyone home and shut the building down." Amazon spokesperson Vogel said in an email regarding the incident: "We continue to grieve the loss of our colleague, and our thoughts and prayers remain with his loved ones and our team at the facility. We're

working closely with authorities to thoroughly investigate the incident and implement corrective actions to enhance safety. We're also ensuring our employees have everything they need to feel supported, including counseling services, and will continue to do so in the days and weeks ahead."