

# LIFE IN THE AMAZON PANOPTICON: AN INTERNATIONAL SURVEY OF AMAZON WORKERS

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**UAI** global  
union

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# INTRODUCTION

In 2021, UNI Global Union released its report on “The Amazon Panopticon”, describing in detail the elaborate surveillance system that Amazon uses to monitor its employees at all levels of the company’s operations, from cameras in warehouses, to GPS-tracking driver apps, to Ring doorbells.

This year, UNI commissioned an international survey of Amazon workers, conducted by Jarrow Insights, focused specifically on studying the concrete human effects that this technological surveillance apparatus has on the people who experience it.

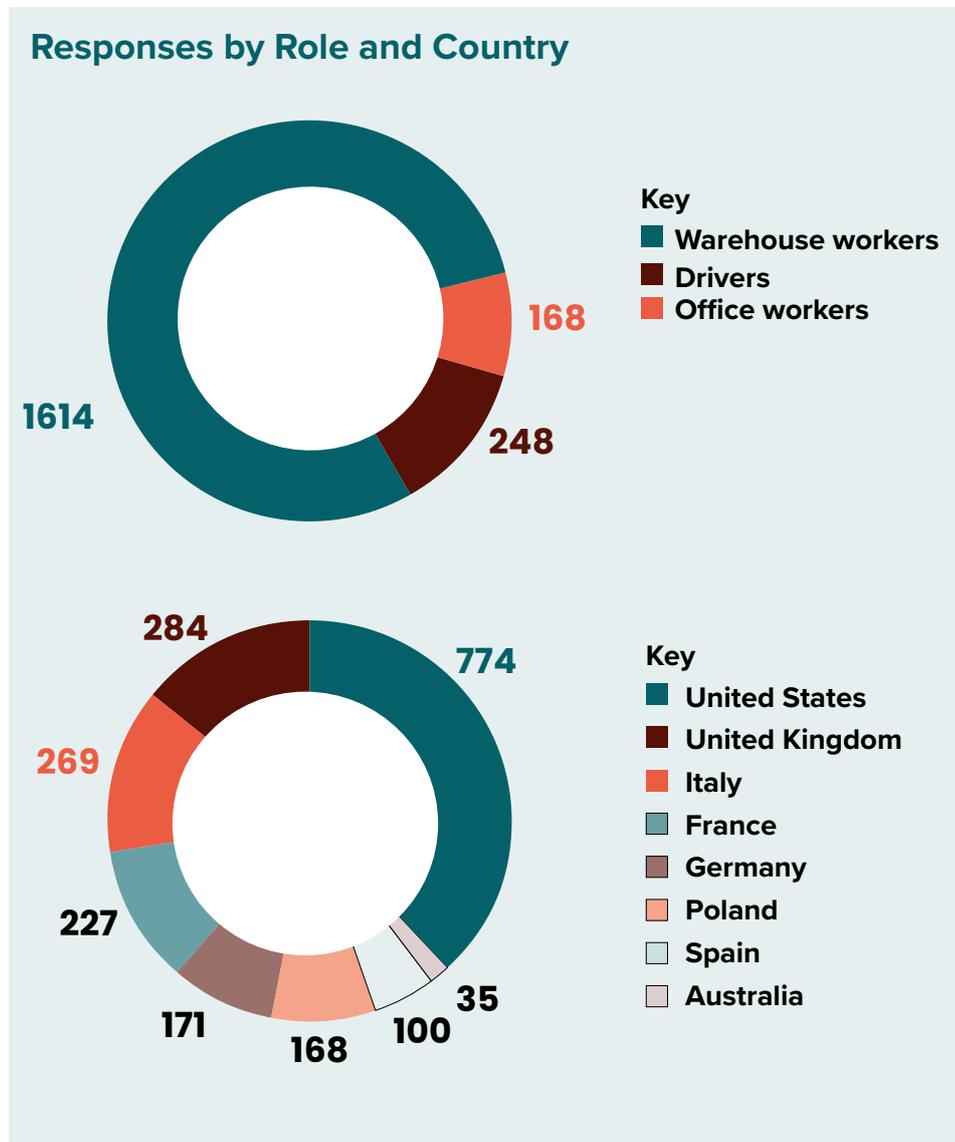


Figure 1: Survey responses by Role and Country

The survey was distributed to likely Amazon workers through digital advertising on social media platforms, as well as through outreach to Amazon worker organizations. It was directed at warehouse workers, delivery drivers, and office workers in the tech and customer service areas.

With **over 2000 responses** from self-identified Amazon workers from **8 countries**, this is the largest independent survey of Amazon workers ever conducted. Studying the responses together, a clear picture emerges across countries and roles. The majority of workers surveyed expressed their belief that Amazon’s monitoring of their work performance is **excessive** and **opaque**, that its expectations are **unrealistic**, and that striving to meet these unrealistic expectations has **negative effects on their physical health** and, even more acutely, their **mental health**.

As some respondents noted, a company as sprawling as Amazon needs technological systems in place to coordinate workers and manage inventory, logistics, and workflows.

In the following pages, we will explore what Amazon workers told us about Amazon’s monitoring systems point by point, covering productivity expectations, health effects, transparency, and accountability. The structure of the report links the quantitative results of the survey to relevant selections from the more than **20,000 words of testimony shared by workers**, in order to give context to the numbers. We will conclude with a summary of the results to link the findings presented here to existing and urgent advocacy for the rights and well-being of Amazon workers.

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The system workers describe, however, goes far beyond these practical considerations, and instead seems intentionally designed to generate a constant sense of pressure and inadequacy. As one worker succinctly put it: **“They set you up for failure”**.

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**“THERE IS  
ABSOLUTELY NO  
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CAMERA SHOULD  
BE POINTING  
DIRECTLY AT  
ME ALL DAY.”**

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# HOW DOES AMAZON MONITOR ITS WORKERS?

Amazon monitors its workers for many reasons, using a variety of devices across various roles. Monitoring can help direct workers to where the company needs them, enforce safety protocols, and guard against theft. Perhaps most pervasively, though, advanced monitoring technology allows Amazon to closely track worker productivity at an individual level.

Respondents were asked to identify what devices they felt specifically were used to monitor their performance on the job. The following chart shows the top 3 most referenced devices among warehouse workers, delivery drivers, and office workers.

Warehouse workers	Delivery drivers	Office workers
<p><b>71.4%</b></p> <p><b>Handscanners</b>            “They count time on breaks to the very second by means of handscanners at the work station.”            - US warehouse worker</p>	<p><b>88.7%</b></p> <p><b>Company apps</b>            “If your Mentor app score is low they threaten to sanction you.”            -Spanish delivery driver</p>	<p><b>55.3%</b></p> <p><b>Activity tracking software</b>            “They monitor your down time through the programs we work with.”            - US customer service worker</p>
<p><b>52.1%</b></p> <p><b>Badges</b>            “They monitor you based on badge swipes. But forget to add time spent waiting on stations, walking to different floors, and machine problems.”            - US warehouse worker</p>	<p><b>50.8%</b></p> <p><b>GPS Devices</b>            “The route is entirely visible to the DSP<sup>1</sup>. They can see how long we stop at each point, can see if we have finished the tour and send us elsewhere, and can also send us warnings in case of excessive pause.”            - French delivery driver</p>	<p><b>33.9%</b></p> <p><b>Chime (Amazon’s internal communications program)</b>            “Going ‘inactive’ on chime sent my manager on a frenzy.”            - US customer service worker</p>
<p><b>49.1%</b></p> <p><b>Work station screens</b>            “When they remind you about rules on the screen, I feel the pressure regarding possible errors or slowness.”            - Italian warehouse worker</p>	<p><b>38.3%</b></p> <p><b>In-vehicle cameras</b>            “There is absolutely no reason that a camera should be pointing directly at me all day. That is a total and clear violation of my right to privacy.”            - US delivery driver</p>	<p><b>32.7%</b></p> <p><b>Email</b>            “They can read all messages/ emails.”            - US tech worker</p>

<sup>1</sup> Amazon Delivery Service Partners (DSPs) are independent companies that Amazon contracts for last mile delivery. While technically not owned by Amazon, DSPs lease Amazon-branded vehicles (the dark blue vans seen in many cities), and drivers often report a quasi-employment relationship with Amazon, where the DSP acts as intermediary and manager.

# UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

“Being overworked and underpaid trying to reach **nearly impossible goals** and metrics is degrading. We have to be perfect to keep our job.”  
- US delivery driver

The devices listed in the previous section allow Amazon to quantify worker productivity, and thus to set measurable targets – commonly called “rates” in the warehouse context. The results of the survey indicate a widespread sentiment among workers that Amazon’s targets are unreasonable. Statistically speaking, **54.2%** of Amazon workers surveyed said that Amazon’s productivity targets are either difficult or very difficult to achieve. Only **17.9%** said they were either easy or very easy to achieve. Furthermore, in their commentary, many workers express a sense that the bar is constantly being raised.

“I’ve been working there for 5 years, **It’s only gotten worse**, more and more production etc...”  
- French warehouse worker

“They **demand more production every day** and they decrease the number of employees.”  
- Spanish warehouse worker

“I feel rushed to make my rate and half way through the work week **I’m exhausted.**”  
- US warehouse worker

Productivity monitoring is a discipline mechanism. At Amazon, failing to “make rate” carries the threat of dismissal<sup>2</sup>. Amazon’s unreasonable standards mean that workers are under constant threat of losing their jobs, playing a game they cannot win. A full **53.5%** of current workers surveyed said they fear being fired for not reaching productivity targets, while **46.2%** of former workers felt it had an impact on their leaving Amazon, whether they quit or were fired<sup>3</sup>.

“**Rigged**, no matter what you do you’re always in the wrong and never good enough.”  
- UK delivery driver

“Every stop or break is being monitored, The DSP manager later gets asked by Amazon why certain stops took so long. However, **none of this information is ever used to actually improve conditions at work.**”  
- German delivery driver

<sup>2</sup> This was confirmed in [recent testimony](#) by an Amazon official in the UK parliament (relevant discussion at 11:13:54)

<sup>3</sup> Respondents were given the opportunity to specify whether they were fired or quit, but could also choose not to specify

## “It’s all about numbers”

Many workers testified that Amazon’s reliance on algorithms and technological monitoring for workplace discipline leads to an excessive focus on numbers, while the complex daily realities of the work process often get lost.

One recurring complaint, for example, had to do with the company’s strict break policy in warehouses, which fails to account for geography, and effectively punishes workers who happen to be further away from break rooms and bathrooms.

“Breaks are 20 mins from scan to scan, and do not include time to walk from [your] station to [the] break room.”

- US warehouse worker

“**Break times are very strict and enforced.** If you are over by 2min or more, your break time will be sent to the manager. Also break times start from when you scan your last item, and end when you scan your first item after break, your break doesn’t start from when you actually sit down outside etc., so you lose a few min. from your break.”

- Australian warehouse worker

A myopic focus on numbers also leads Amazon’s system to neglect other subtle but important idiosyncrasies, including varying rates and difficulties of incoming work, as well as general problem-solving. Aspects like these can be somewhat intangible but, as any worker who actually does the job will agree, they are nonetheless a crucial part of the work process, and dealing with them constitutes real work.

“[They] **didn’t consider work load** and different sizes of parcels.”

- UK warehouse worker

“The computer software only counts the number of packages shipped. It does not allow for **malfunctioning equipment**, wrong box sizes, restocking your work stations, etc.”

- US warehouse worker

“Monitoring of errors by the electronic system does not take into account **technical conditions** and problems with machines.”

- Polish warehouse worker

“Many tasks that we encounter at our stations are not calculated and therefore, sometimes, the manager believes that we are doing nothing, even though we are working.”

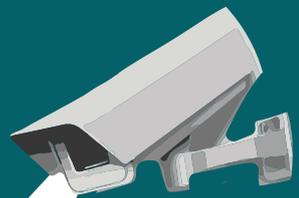
- French warehouse worker

“The routing system doesn’t account for **real world and real time occurrences, setbacks, obstacles**, breaks, etc.”

- US delivery driver

**“WE AREN’T  
PEOPLE TO  
THEM, WE  
ARE ENTIRELY  
REPLACEABLE  
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MACHINE.”**

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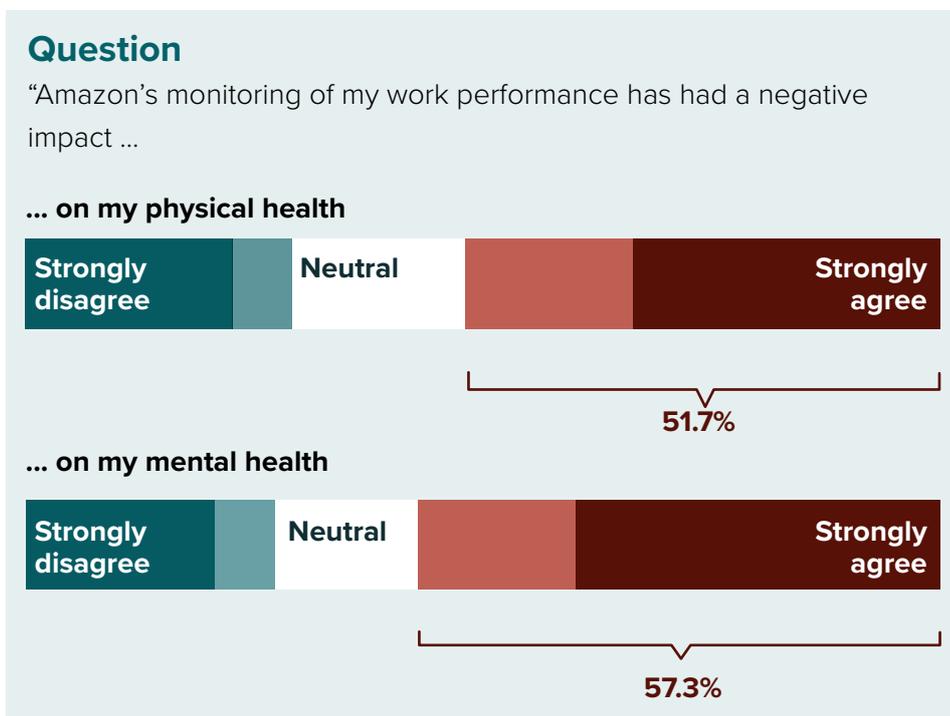


# IMPACTING HEALTH

Even under what they describe as exaggerated and unrealistic expectations, workers must try to keep up, sometimes pushing themselves and their bodies to the limit, with consequences for their health.

Despite its use of cutting-edge technologies and state-of-the-art facilities, research has shown that injury rates at Amazon's warehouses are significantly higher than industry averages<sup>4</sup>. The results of the survey shed light on this apparent contradiction. Worker testimony indicates that it is often precisely this cutting-edge technology that pushes workers to work harder and faster, at the expense of both their physical and mental health.

As can be seen clearly in Fig. 2, over half of Amazon workers surveyed believe that Amazon's monitoring systems have had a negative impact on their health along both dimensions, with the impact on mental health being even more pronounced. Notably, the number of workers who were neutral (white) and the number who disagreed (green) were both fewer for mental health than for physical health.



**Fig 2:**  
Impacting health

<sup>4</sup> "The Injury Machine: How Amazon's Production System Hurts Workers", Strategic Organizing Center, Apr. 2022, retrieved 11/27/22

When it comes to physical health, the intense work pace at Amazon (set by its technological monitoring systems) can worsen pre-existing medical issues just as it can create new ones.

“I now have **consistent migraines.**”

- US Tech worker

“I got an infraction because I was having an asthma attack on the highway and needed to reach into my bag to grab my inhaler. It logged it as distracted driving.”

- US delivery driver

“I had two surgeries on my wrists and after returning to work I was harassed for not reaching my targets, everyday negative feedbacks and I had to explain why I can't reach the targets even with doctors recommendations to not overstrain my hands. Now I'm off work again as my carpal tunnel returned and extended to nerve entrapment in elbow.”

- UK warehouse worker

“As a rebinner in Outbound Sort Flow, **my quota was nearly physically impossible to reach.** Rebinning requires fast walking through the entire shift to meet the minimum quota, I developed tendonitis due to suddenly being put on Rebin/suddenly fastwalking each shift for the entire period. This tendonitis caused me to be unable to show up, which resulted in me being fired for Job Abandonment.”

- US warehouse worker

“Having a lot of back problems that have worsened enormously because of them. I told them about the pain and **they never took anything seriously...**”

- French warehouse worker

Several workers who suffer from conditions such as irritable-bowel syndrome (IBS), which require them to spend more time in the restroom, reported frictions with the company's infamous time-off-task (ToT) policies, and a lack of accommodation from the company.

“Today I received a write-up for - unaccounted for idle time - due to my IBS. **I'm constantly harassed** over missing work or restroom breaks due to my illness.”

- US warehouse worker

“I suffer from IBS and have been written up for ‘time off task’... I am constantly getting emails about “termination” even though my condition is both documented, and a Federally and Amazon recognized disability.”

- US warehouse worker

“I understand that they want to make sure everyone follows break rules but I **have a medical issue** and that requires a little longer bathroom break. Most [of] my break is waiting for a stall in the restroom.”

- US warehouse worker

Just as we saw that Amazon reduces workers’ productivity to blunt numbers, these examples show how workers themselves are subjected to one-size-fits-all expectations, ignoring individual differences and needs. This can be further illustrated by several stories that workers shared concerning Amazon’s treatment of older employees.

“I am not worried about my own performance, but Amazon does not take health or age into account. They expect the same performance from 65 year olds that they expect from 20 year olds. Accommodations are possible, but not always easy to get put through. **It puts the older people at risk for permanent injury** in order to simply keep their employment.”

- US warehouse worker

“They want to fire an older gentleman for not physically being able to keep up with the work.”

- US warehouse worker

For a company so focused on growth, approaches like these might seem rational as a way to weed out underperformers. In fact, as is well-known, Amazon has some of the highest employee turnover rates of any major corporation. This matches up with Jeff Bezos’ own reported aversion to the idea of long-term employment at Amazon<sup>5</sup>. The human cost of this philosophy is high. As one worker put it: “We aren’t people to them, we are entirely replaceable cogs in the machine.”

## SPOTLIGHT

**65.7%** of drivers in particular reported a negative impact on their physical health stemming from productivity monitoring.

“**I feel like I’m drowning all day**, causing me to drive in unsafe ways to meet the unreasonable expectation[s],” one US driver explained.

<sup>5</sup> Kay, Grace. “Amazon Tracks Warehouse Workers’ Every Move Because Jeff Bezos Thinks People Are Inherently Lazy, Report Says.” Business Insider, 17 June 2021

## “Productivity over safety”

Survey respondents consistently expressed that safety comes second to productivity at Amazon.

Like all major employers, Amazon has safety protocols intended to reduce injury rates and health issues, in accordance with local laws. In this case, monitoring systems could be a tool to help ensure workplace safety. This is not the situation at Amazon as revealed by the results of the survey. Instead, as one US driver put it: “Safety standards have gone up but the high expectations have not gone down.”

“Amazon favors productivity over safety. They won’t make safety changes unless someone gets hurt if it’s really bad. If not they will let it happen multiple times before they make changes. Their first goal will be to **blame the person who got hurt.**”

- US warehouse worker

“The monitoring has only led to an increase in the number of deliveries and is not really concerned about the safety of the driver.”

- Italian delivery driver

“I had a fairly serious car accident, because I didn’t dare to do an emergency brake for fear of lowering my FICO score (e-mentor)... I’m almost afraid to stop 5/ 10min chat with a customer (yet useful for the good image of Amazon..) or do my business because they have geolocated trucks and the stopping time is indicated to them. As soon as we stop they let us know . When deer suddenly cross the road, I don’t even have the reflex to brake so as not to penalize my FICO score once again.”

- French delivery driver

**“I GOT WRITTEN  
UP THE DAY  
I GOT BACK  
FROM LOSING  
MY SON.”**

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# THE MENTAL TOLL

“They even had a camera in front of the bathroom door.”  
- Italian warehouse worker

We have already seen that workers fear losing their jobs for failing to meet what they describe as excessive expectations. We have also seen how meeting these excessive expectations sometimes means pushing their bodies to unreasonable extremes. As the results in Figure 3 show, however, workers indicate that Amazon’s monitoring has an even worse effect on their mental health. This is true across all worker roles.

## SPOTLIGHT

The disproportionate effect of surveillance on workers’ mental health was **starkest in Poland, where 66% of surveyed workers indicated a negative impact on their mental health**, compared to 54.4% who reported an impact on their physical health.

The meaning of this mental toll can be parsed out by studying workers’ subjective experiences on the job. In one question, respondents were asked to describe in a single word the way Amazon’s monitoring of their work performance makes them feel. In total, workers used **527** unique words and phrases, of which **3/4** were identified as negative by a manual review. Below we present the top 10 most frequently appearing words or short phrases in english.

**STRESSED,  
PRESSURED,  
ANXIOUS,  
LIKE A SLAVE,  
ROBOT,  
UNTRUSTED,  
LIKE A NUMBER,  
PRISON, FINE,  
UNCOMFORTABLE**

Figure 3: Amazon workers describe the way Amazon’s monitoring makes them feel. Word size is proportional to frequency.

From these words, we can identify several diverse dimensions of mental strain that Amazon's productivity apparatus generates.

**“Stressed”,  
“anxious”**

These words are representative of the high percentage of respondents who fear losing their jobs, and both bring to mind testimony about concerns over punishment for the smallest errors.

“It's outrageous that you can work at a ridiculous pace trying to keep up with Amazon's demands, only for your manager to come after your shift and point out that you accidentally scanned 2 packages out of the 2000 you handled into the wrong bag (which the system rejected anyway).”

- German warehouse worker

**“Like a slave”,  
“like a number”,  
“robot”**

These expressions all point to lack of agency, as well as a sense of dehumanization.

“The system can't treat people like this ... we work with robots but we aren't robots ourselves.”

- Polish warehouse worker

“Relentless on humans, they take us for animals.”

- French delivery driver

## “Untrusted”, “pressured”, “prison”

These words imply a sense of subjugation – workers express an understanding that their condition is being imposed on them by an outside force, whether it be the company, managers, or the algorithm itself.

“The floor managers are constantly putting pressure on you even after you hit the targets.”

- UK warehouse worker

“It’s just amazing that you can bust your ass sorting thousands of packages in an allotted time frame, and no matter what your managers will still find something to criticize.”

- German warehouse worker

## “Fine”

This word, in contrast to the others, represents the minority of workers who do not consider Amazon’s monitoring of their work to be a problem.

Some such respondents indicated that they worked in office roles, mostly in tech, where productivity and performance was evaluated more traditionally through feedback from human managers.

“As far as I know, Amazon isn’t monitoring my work via tech tools. My performance is tracked by my manager and my completion of projects. But I’m a corporate employee, so I’m sure it’s different for warehouse or delivery workers.”

- US Tech worker

In a sense, testimony such as this is the exception that proves the rule – the stress and anxiety induced by excessive technological monitoring is necessarily missing from roles where that monitoring is not employed. It should be noted that many office workers did express serious concerns over monitoring, particularly those working in customer service where labor is more easily quantifiable, as we shall see later.

## “One bad day”

“I got written up the day I got back from losing my son.”  
- US warehouse worker

The mental cost of working at Amazon, which we have seen clearly expressed by workers in both numbers and words, can be explained in part by what appears to be a notable absence of positive reinforcement from management, particularly in the warehouse. Workers describe a management culture lacking in basic empathy – one that reflects the unforgiving and fundamentally non-human algorithm that constitutes its foundation.

“When rates are reached there is nobody to come to congratulate you... On the other hand, the one day when you’re tired and your performance is not top, they are the first to come to you ask for a reason.”  
- French warehouse worker

“Sometimes I can be a bit below the expected rate because it’s physically exhausting to work at Amazon, and when I tell my leader why I’m slower that day **they don’t care at all** and just say to work harder.”  
- Polish warehouse worker

“I got a write up for my performance without a verbal warning or coaching. One bad day and they wrote me up for it.”  
- US warehouse worker

“How can they come to ask you why you’re slow when one day you’re worse than normal, and you’re always super good?  
**The smallest thing and they bite.**”  
- Spanish warehouse worker

## “Not even a moment to breathe” - customer service workers face intense pressure

Amazon does not limit its use of surveillance to those who handle, box, and deliver its merchandise.

The number of survey responses from customer service workers was relatively small compared to those from warehouse workers, in part reflecting their smaller share of Amazon’s workforce. Nonetheless, the results were striking, **with 61% of customer service workers reporting an impact on their mental health.** They were also consistent, and many of the stories shared by these workers across various countries seem to mirror the relentless work culture we see described by warehouse workers and drivers.

“In Social Media Customer Service there is **extreme pressure to be absolutely perfect.** They monitor your breaks heavily. I have so many timers set so that I don’t make a mistake, it makes me anxious. They monitor your down time through the programs we work with and try to eliminate that to wring every bit of work they can from you without increasing pay or benefits.”

- US customer service worker

“We are constantly monitored with multiple tools by the company, between one call and the next **we don’t even have time to breathe.**”

- Italian customer service worker

“Every week, before I go to work, I am consumed by stress. Customer service work, as well as targets (quantitative, temporal and qualitative). exhaust me mentally and make me anxious about being fired. The load of work and incoming contacts is very large and sometimes **there is not even a moment to breathe** between contacts.”

- Polish customer service worker

These stories indicate that even those working for Amazon from home can be subject to the same pressures and excessive monitoring, so long as their work is quantifiable. This can explain why relatively fewer self-identified tech workers identified monitoring as an issue for them – as some shared, their work is often more objective-based, and subject to qualitative evaluation. In contrast, the tasks of customer service workers, much like warehouse workers in direct roles, and delivery drivers with set routes, are quite easily reduced to numbers – calls or tickets to be resolved.

**“THEY ARE SUPER  
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AND PUT A LOT  
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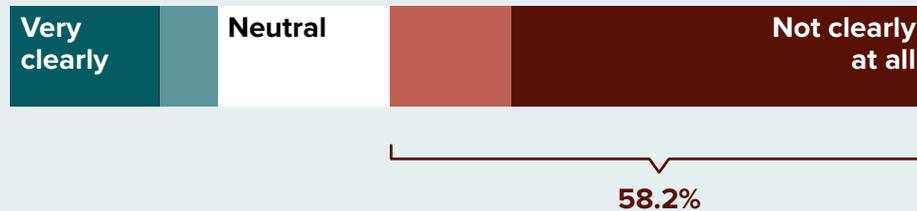


# A LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

The workers surveyed agreed by large majorities: Amazon does not clearly explain how it uses the data it collects from them on the job at all.

## Question

How clearly has Amazon explained how it will use the data it collects from monitoring you on the job?



**Figure 4: Amazon does not clearly explain the way it uses worker data.**

We have seen how unrealistic expectations make some workers feel **pressured** and **anxious**, but others expressed sentiments more related to their sense of personal privacy, feeling **uncomfortable**, **spied on**, and even **violated**. In this vein, **58.8%** of workers stated that Amazon's monitoring of their productivity is excessive.

"I used to work at an Amazon depot... We were never told that we were monitored, until one day we had to take out all the yellow bags (used to store parcels in & given to deliver drivers) as the cameras were mistaking them for our yellow hi-vis jackets and sending out warnings thinking that people were standing around & not being productive. I knew we were tracked through the handheld devices, but not through the security cameras. **That just felt like an invasion of my privacy.**"

- UK warehouse worker

"In Customer Service we are constantly monitored second by second, in whatever we do, with no respect for the working privacy provided by the CCNL TLC<sup>6</sup>."

- Italian customer service worker

<sup>6</sup> National collective work contract for telecommunications workers in Italy. More information can be found [here](#), retrieved 11/28/22

Amazon's algorithms are not static. They evolve and "learn" based on the data they receive from the monitoring of workers. This means that workers are not just the subjects of the surveillance apparatus, but also, in a way, its teachers. Even so, they receive no insight into how their own lessons are implemented, much less a say in the matter.

"They didn't tell us what production we had to achieve, or what you actually did achieve. I was always told that I was well above average, but they never clarified anything. They are super strict with production and put a lot of **physical and psychological pressure** on you."

- Spanish warehouse worker

"Logistics for selecting paths for pick are abstract, there is no logic at all. If someone better coordinated this process, it would be easier to achieve the goal."

- Polish warehouse worker

## Computers vs. humans

"An algorithm should not be in command."

- Italian delivery driver

Worker testimony describes a system where the first line of productivity monitoring has been outsourced almost completely to algorithms, and away from human managers. This leads to a situation where workers experience a near constant fear of arbitrary punishment meted out by an inflexible, and often imperfectly functioning, computer system.

"All of my requests, questions, concerns are always answered via email by an automatic response and rarely ever a human being. E.g. was unable to make a block because I was flooded in and could not leave my suburb. Amazon responded with an automated response. One that didn't answer my questions or concerns at all."

- Australian delivery driver

"A coworker's handheld device was acting up during picking stage and kept locking up and freezing while he continued to pick the bags for delivery. Due to all the crashing the ai marked him for tot and management found him and accused him of not working. Only to be told he was working the entire time."

- US warehouse worker

It is not just rank-and-file workers that are subject to algorithmic management. Several respondents who self-identified as managers expressed a sense of frustration and powerlessness in the face of inhuman systems whose instructions they feel obliged to carry out.

"I was the leader of a warehouse, I monitored the results of others as well as mine. **Results are very inaccurate** and underestimated. Employees seem to be working on a level but just an hour or two delay is enough for the whole result to go below required."

- Polish warehouse manager

"I am a manager at amazon who uses tracking software daily, Amazon tracks an employee's every scan down to the second and automatically generates reports for time off task which **the manager is forced to act** on."

- US warehouse manager

"As a former manager Amazon used Connections questions to grade us. Managers are not labor tracked but instead reviewed by the people we have to labor track (hourly workers). It is a double edged sword because the computer system can write up an employee for something we did not know about, but the the employee can give low scores daily to the manager for the write up."

- US warehouse manager

"Forced to monitor track and question associates about their inferred time."

- US warehouse manager

"If one of my subordinates is not performing as expected, I have to go see him very quickly to understand why he is not performing at the expected rate."

- French warehouse manager

Workers experience the other side of this equation forcefully. Dozens of respondents specifically highlighted the way managers often appear to check in on workers if they "go idle" for even a few minutes. These experiences can often be humiliating.

"I was written up for having a low rate. The rate was 30. My rate was at 26. I was pulled aside only for the PA to speak extremely loudly anyway. Defeating the purpose of stepping away from other associates."

- US warehouse worker

"We had a 30-minute break on the delivery route, but I normally used to stop several times for a few minutes. One day when I did the opposite - stopped for my entire break - they called me from the office to see what was happening."

- Spanish delivery driver

## Going in circles: Amazon drivers deal with irrational routes

When Amazon's algorithmic routing systems defy logic, the pressure is on drivers to do the impossible on the clock.

Ideally, some technological advances can not only reduce human effort, but also deliver better results. Algorithmically-powered routing would appear to be a perfect opportunity for this. In theory, a computer should be able to calculate "optimal" delivery routes in a fraction of the time of humans. In practice, Amazon delivery drivers often find themselves forced to follow routes that no human would draw - for good reason.

"the app draws delivery routes that are **physically impossible to follow**; because of the amount of work without a break to eat and because of the way they are designed, such as, for example, telling you to drive the van through a street where it is prohibited to enter because it is pedestrianized, or indicating double stops in apartment buildings that do not have an elevator, so you have to climb stairs to the door of the homes dozens of times..."

- Spanish delivery driver

"The routes we're given aren't organized well on the road... My biggest gripe is the flex app constantly having us going in circles out on the road making us look like we're idiots who don't know where they're going."

- US delivery driver

There are some ways that Amazon's reliance on algorithmic routing does "work" for the company, however. Several drivers noted a feature of the system where multiple nearby delivery locations are grouped into a single stop — an error that makes any real productivity accounting false, but which is useful for pressuring drivers to work harder and faster.

"Some of the stops started grouping up on the itinerary day after day and the systems started counting those destinations as one stop instead of [the] number of stops they really were. You would have multiple houses grouped up as one which would cause the system to inaccurately say we have an X amount of stops when really there would be 20, 30, 40, maybe 50 more stops on our routes that aren't accounted for thus making Amazon push the DSPs to **push the drivers to finish quicker** than what the Amazon's algorithm predicts we would finish by."

- US delivery driver



**“THEY WALKED  
THROUGH THE  
CORRIDORS TO  
MAKE SURE I DIDN’T  
EVEN EXCHANGE  
A WORD WITH  
COLLEAGUES.”**

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# AN ATMOSPHERE OF FEAR

**"I constantly remind our employees to be afraid, to wake up every morning terrified."**

- Former Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, 1998 shareholder letter<sup>7</sup>

Beyond the pressure of meeting productivity expectations, and the discomfort at being excessively monitored, workers indicated another distinct dimension of the experience of working at Amazon: fear, of the kind one might expect from the subjects of a police state. In fact, several workers chose to characterize their feelings as exactly "dystopian", while others used the image of "Big Brother".

These feelings are reflected in the recurring testimony by workers that Amazon doesn't even want them talking to each other.

"Managers come to ask if you are okay after a short time that you have not scanned a piece, or as soon as they see you talking to a colleague with the excuse that you are distracted."

- Italian warehouse worker

"They even **came to look for you in the bathroom**. They walked through the corridors to make sure I didn't even exchange a word with colleagues."

- Italian warehouse worker

"My co-workers and I were **always scared to speak in front of cameras** while working."

- Australian warehouse worker

"With about 200+ cameras in the warehouse it felt that we were being watched 24/7 and judged based on our performance. We could not speak much and had to **work robotically with such high pressure**."

- Australian warehouse worker

"Those who work hard just stop for 5 minutes to say hello to someone, or to sit down because **they can't take it anymore**, and a manager or lead arrives behind them to make them go back to work."

- French warehouse worker

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<sup>7</sup> Text can be found [here](#), retrieved 11/29/22

Perhaps unsurprisingly, these considerations even affected workers' experience of the very survey they were filling out.

“Please do not mention my name or anything like that.”

- German warehouse worker

“**I fear losing my job**, therefore, I have to respectfully decline [to share additional stories]. Sorry.”

- US delivery driver

Comments like these indicate a pervasive environment of fear, where workers do not feel comfortable speaking their minds, even outside of work. Such an atmosphere also impedes workers from easily exercising their right to organize and collectively demand that the many diverse grievances uncovered in this report be addressed.



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# CONCLUSIONS

On balance, the results of the largest ever survey of Amazon workers paints a clear picture. The workers surveyed find Amazon's technological monitoring of their work to be **excessive**. The productivity targets they are expected to meet were described as **unrealistic**. In order to try and reach these expectations, they **push themselves to the limit**, with impacts on their physical health and, even more acutely, their mental health.

Overwhelmingly, the surveyed workers report that **Amazon is not transparent** regarding how it uses their data. **53.5% said they fear being fired** for not reaching productivity targets, and many described **an unaccountable system**, where even managers must defer to unforgiving algorithms.

Many of the individual findings of this report may be unsurprising to those who have investigated or read about working conditions at Amazon. What is new is the scale of data, the richness and diversity of worker testimony, and the striking consistency across various countries.

In this way, the results of the survey lend a **greater sense of urgency** to ongoing advocacy for the rights of Amazon workers worldwide.



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