

ethikos Volume 34, Number 6. June 01, 2020 Amazon under the gun

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Amazon.com Inc. is facing scrutiny from lawmakers after a series of actions, including firing employees after they had raised workplace concerns^[1] and purchasing equipment from blacklisted Chinese companies.^[2] The demand for Amazon's delivery services has also skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic.^[3]

Several Amazon warehouse employees—in different locations around the United States—spoke out about workplace conditions they regarded as unsafe. Amazon's response has been, generally, to fire those workers and defend its policies as being among the best in the nation. One particular incident, the firing of warehouse worker Christian Smalls, led to New York's state attorney general office investigating and sending a letter. The letter, obtained by NPR,^[4] claimed that “the information so far available to us raises concerns that Amazon's health and safety measures taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are so inadequate that they may violate several provisions of the Occupational Safety and Health Act” and that “many workers are fearful about speaking out about their concerns following the termination of Mr. Smalls' employment. ... This is a particularly dangerous message to send during a pandemic, when chilling worker speech about health and safety practices could literally be a matter of life and death.”

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