



ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

JB PRITZKER
GOVERNOR

JANE R. FLANAGAN
DIRECTOR

January 31, 2023

To Governor Pritzker and members of the Illinois General Assembly:

Please see attached for the report of the November 2, 2023, meeting of the Warehouse Safety Standards Task Force, as required by 20 ILCS 4124/3-10 (below.) This report was approved by the Task Force on January 30, 2024.

Sec. 3-10. Reports. The Task Force must provide quarterly updates of its findings, discussions, and decisions to the Governor and the General Assembly. The Task Force shall submit a final report of its recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly no later than January 1, 2025.

Sincerely,

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Report to the Governor and General Assembly on the Warehouse Safety Standards Task Force, for the meeting held November 2, 2023

Pursuant to Public Act 102-1115, the General Assembly established the Warehouse Safety Standards Task Force to study warehouse safety standards. The Task Force is charged with providing quarterly updates of its findings, discussions, and decisions to the Governor and General Assembly, leading to a final report of recommendations by January 1, 2025.

The Task Force held its second meeting on November 2, 2023, at Joliet Junior College in Joliet, Illinois. The meeting began with housekeeping items such as discussion of bylaws and the order of items in the agenda, and review and approval of the first quarterly report prepared after the first meeting on July 18, 2023.

The substantive business of the meeting began with testimony from Tommy Carden from Warehouse Workers for Justice (WWJ). He discussed the importance of logistics and warehousing in the Joliet area, and the work of WWJ. WWJ meets with warehouse workers with concerns about working conditions, and conducts trainings for warehouse workers to know their rights. He noted concerns about warehouse workers experiencing race-based harassment, violence, excessive heat, and repetitive motion injuries. He discussed inadequate safety training provided to temporary workers, as compared to directly hired employees of the client. He urged the Task Force to study paths forward to ensuring increased health and safety in warehouses. After his remarks, members of the Task Force discussed whether a temporary labor agency, or the warehouse client or operator, should provide safety hazard training and emergency response training.

Task Force members then inquired about excessive heat in warehouses, and Illinois Department of Labor staff explained the role of the State of Illinois, through Illinois OSHA, in regulating health and safety in the public sector (state and local governments.) The State of Illinois is federally pre-empted from enacting health and safety standards on private sector employers, such as warehouses.

Tommy Carden and Marcos Cenicerros, also of WWJ, additionally provided information about first aid clinics in Amazon warehouses, and local workers who attended the meeting shared stories of being treated at the first aid clinic and sent back out to the warehouse floor to work.

Task Force members initiated a discussion of whether the Task Force discussion was too focused on Amazon's practices, given that there are many different warehouse owners and operators, and many different types of warehouses, and other large-footprint operations, throughout Illinois. Others later responded that due to its nature as a major industry player, conversation naturally gravitated towards Amazon's practices.

The next scheduled speaker was Dr. Beth Gutelius, from the University of Illinois-Chicago Center for Urban Economic Development. Dr. Gutelius presented a [report on the future of warehouse work](#) that she and Dr. Nik Theodore of the UIC College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs published in 2019, focusing on technology adoption in the warehouse industry. Drs. Gutelius and Theodore found that technology adoption among warehouse operators has been slow and uneven; warehouses compete on cost; and new technology has the potential to improve warehouse working

conditions, but has been implemented in ways that undermine job quality.

The authors recently released [a pandemic-related update to this report](#), which reported the following findings:

- A pandemic-caused boom did not materialize as predicted.
- Warehouse operators relied on labor strategy experimentation, such as increased reliance on temporary staffing agencies, to cope with labor demand.
- Warehousing has soared, with 80,000 workers working in the warehousing industry in Illinois alone.
- Warehouse wages have stagnated over the long term, despite traditional economic theory dictating that as labor demand rises, wages should also rise. Adjusted for inflation, the average warehouse worker wage is lower in 2023 than it was in 1990.

Dr. Gutelius, along with colleague Dr. Sanjay Pinto, also released [a new report](#) of a survey of more than 1,400 Amazon workers, at 451 different facilities in 42 states. Dr. Gutelius contends that Amazon, as a clear industry leader, holds an important place in the debate, and cited the "Amazon effect" on trends in warehousing.

From her work with Dr. Pinto, Dr. Gutelius offered 3 findings from the survey of Amazon workers:

1. Injury and pain are more widespread than previously thought. 41% of workers surveyed reported injuries received on the job, and 69% reported taking unpaid time off work because of pain or exhaustion resulting from their work. Dr. Gutelius noted that the study's injury data is higher than reported elsewhere, apparently due to underreporting.
2. 52% of workers surveyed reported feeling burned out. Longer tenured workers were more likely to report a mental health toll.
3. The pace of work combined with workplace monitoring, have an impact on health concerns. Amazon workers reported that workplace monitoring is more common at Amazon than other warehouses.

Task Force members requested information from the Department of Labor regarding third party actors such as temporary labor agencies and logistics companies.

The next agenda item was the opportunity for remarks from the family of Clayton Cope, a worker at the Amazon warehouse facility in Edwardsville who was killed when a tornado destroyed the warehouse on December 10, 2021. Carla Cope, Clayton's mother, spoke about the importance of establishing standards and practices for safety procedures in warehouses. She stated that warehouses should have an emergency response plan, designated safe places, and a way to get the workers to those safe places.

Next, the Task Force discussed topics for future meetings. There was discussion of including topics such as environmental standards, but others felt the Task Force should stay focused on

structural safety and emergency response policies, and areas where the state has authority to take action. Members discussed the framework of state and local building codes. The group concluded that the next meeting would be focused on structural safety, with a future meeting focused on building code enforcement.

The Public Comment portion of the meeting followed. During the Public Comment period, local workers asserted that data shows that Amazon has a disproportionately high number of injuries relative to its warehousing footprint. They also shared concerns about blocked fire exits, and dangers faced by workers getting to work on public transit or on foot.

The next Task Force meeting will be held January 30, 2024, at IDOL's Springfield office.