Shelter in Place Fatality File



Amazon driver died in bathroom sheltering from tornado with colleagues.

Amazon cargo driver Austin J. McEwen, 26, was an only child who loved to listen to rapper Mac Miller and hunt with his friends.

He died trying to shelter from a powerful tornado in the bathroom at an Amazon.com (AMZN.O) warehouse on Friday night, according to a coworker.

McEwen was one of six workers identified by police on Sunday who were killed when their plant in Edwardsville, Illinois, buckled under the force of the devastating storm.

Several employees told Reuters that they had been directed to shelter in bathrooms by Amazon managers after receiving emergency alerts on mobile phones from authorities.

Amazon said employees were directed to shelter in place at a designated assembly area at the front of the building, which was near a restroom.

“Our team worked quickly to ensure as many employees and partners could get to the designated Shelter in Place,” the company said in a statement. “We thank them for everything they were able to do.”

Some of those workers said they had kept their phones despite what they believed was a violation of an Amazon policy that prevents them from having cellphones at work.

The company responded by saying that there was no Amazon policy that prevents employees or contractors from having a cell phone at work.

The National Weather Service said the tornado hit the area between 8:28 and 8:32 p.m. central time, intensifying rapidly as it struck the Amazon warehouse. With estimated peak winds of 150 miles per hour (241 km-per-hour) winds, the force was so severe that the roof was ripped off and 11-inch (28-cm) thick concrete walls longer than football fields fell in on themselves.

At least 45 Amazon employees made it out safely. Authorities had given up hope of finding more survivors as they shifted from rescue to recovery efforts that were expected to last days.

On Sunday, Amazon workers arrived at the warehouse across the street, heavily guarded by security, to start shifts.