

GMB UNION REPORT ON AMAZON

2018



What is like to work in a modern day
Amazon Fulfilment Centre in the UK?



GMB UNION
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What is it like to work in a modern day Amazon Fulfilment Centre in the UK?

1. GMB started hearing of problems with members complaining of aches, pains, fatigue, poor treatment, over working, and a general lack of respect shown to Amazon Associates by managers, which we first published in a report in 2014.
2. Throughout 2017/ 2018 again reports started appearing in various articles published in the UK press into poor working conditions and treatment of Associates. Such working conditions that were reported in the press involved workers suffering from fatigue and again ambulances being called to warehouses to either treat Associates, or take them to hospital.
3. Allegations circle Amazon that it uses tax avoidance strategies and tax loop holes which enables it to avoid paying its fair share of Tax based on the revenues it makes. In 2016 revenues from UK sales were 3.2bn, Tax paid 517k. If it is true that Amazon actively avoids paying its fair share, accusations could rightly be made that Amazon has no qualms regards using UK public services which are funded through taxation, and that they also have Associates being paid in-work benefits, because of low pay.
4. **GMB have used Freedom of Information requests to obtain information regards the use of ambulances at Amazon sites**, have been called out **600 times to 14 Amazon warehouses** in the last three financial years. In more than half of those cases, patients were taken to hospital. During the past three calendar years at Amazon's **Rugeley site, ambulances were called 115 times**, including **three for women due to pregnancy/maternity** and **three for major trauma**. Other **disturbing examples include electrocution, unconsciousness, building on fire and chest pains**. At a similar sized supermarket distribution warehouse a few miles away, there were just eight call outs during the same period.

Examples Press Headlines

MailOnline

Amazon staff blast 'intolerable' conditions: Warehouse workers are pictured 'asleep on their feet' as they claim they are forced to work 55-hour weeks and say some are taken away in AMBULANCES

- Amazon staff have been pictured sleeping on the job in Tilbury warehouse
- Staff claim they are shattered from having to meet punishing warehouse targets
- The revelations come at a time when Amazon has promised to improve the treatment of staff following accusations of poor conditions and low pay

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5118951/Amazon-staff-complain-conditions-Tilbury.html#ixzz5FNpFWOXg>

INDEPENDENT

Amazon workers working 55-hour weeks and so exhausted by targets they 'fall asleep standing up' Ambulance crews called after workers collapse at work

- [Harriet Agerholm](#) Monday 27 November 2017 20:45 GMT

2. Despite the poor press coverage that Amazon has attracted in recent years, over allegations of poor treatment of Associates and temporary workers. On each occasion Amazon issued strong denials regarding the allegations made and even went as far in one response to a Newspaper to question whether the allegations were actually made by employees. Amazon usually finished with a quote that Amazon provided great benefits and was a great company to work for.

With so many examples of poor working conditions being reported in the press and in particular fatigue being a common problem, this raised a couple of questions. Had Amazon really changed its practices after the publication of GMB report in 2014? Is it embedded deep in to Amazon DNA that their Associates are no different to Robots, and as such Amazon are “sweating their assets”.

James Bloodworth writer and journalist, and author of the recently published book “Hired” also gave an account of his experiences on working for Amazon at the Rugely Fulfilment Centre. James reported on the severe lack of toilets in the huge warehouse at Rugely, and that he would have to spend considerable time in walking through the giant warehouse, and go through security to access the toilets and back again. This could involve taking some time for him and other Associates. Invariably this could cause problems with downtime, or “idle time” as the phrase is known and used by Amazon managers.

James stated it was not unusual for employees to use a *plastic bottle* rather than visit the toilet to avoid putting themselves at risk of being disciplined for idle time.

The point raised by James on the lack of conveniences at Rugely and the issue of “idle time” is basically another example of poor treatment of Associates, by the company this time using threats to deny Associates a basic human need. This became known as **#AmazonPeeGate**.

Further in this report there are some statements from Amazon Rugely employees echoing the need for more toilets at the Rugely site. Contrast this with the Chair and CEO of Amazon new mansion in Washington, where according to articles in the media, it has 25 Bathrooms. That is approximately 22 more than what is based on the shop floor at the giant Rugely warehouse for around 1,000 Associates.



3. In this midst of the press and media allegations, and from reports of our own members, we decided to survey a sample group of members from a number of Amazon Fulfilment centres based in the UK. The sites surveyed included Rugely in the West Midlands, Dunstable, Hemel Hempstead, Milton Keynes in the South East, Gourock and Edinburgh in Scotland, and Warrington in the North West.

The survey was designed to seek information from our members which may suggest that the hard and fast working conditions placed on Associates, along with the poor planning and design of the fulfilment centres were if anything else the main cause of fatigue that was widely reported.

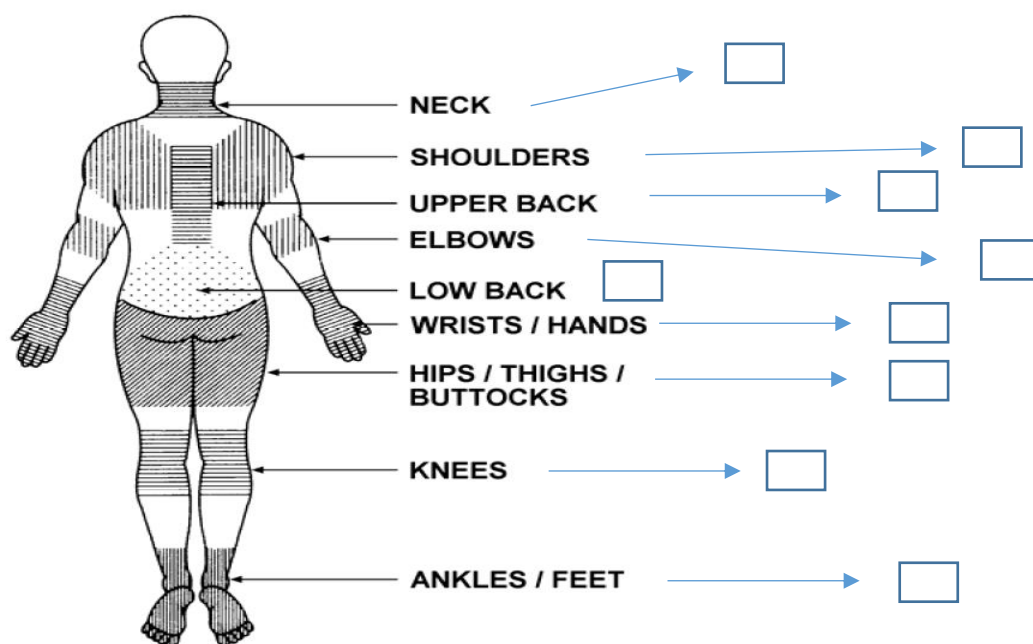
We also wanted to find out if Associates were suffering with the onset of industrial disease, and industrial injury. The form was designed to be as simple as possible. There are many languages spoken on the shop floor at Amazon, and English is not everyone first language.

The recipients were asked to use the letter C or O in the correct box pointing to a joint, indicating whether they had Constant or Occasional pain. We call this body mapping.

Example of Body Mapping Form used

Fig 1

Please indicate the severity of pain i.e. C = Constant O = Occasional in the boxes below.



The example of the Body Mapping form (see above) was accompanied by a few brief questions. The essence of the survey was not to mislead, but to get our members in their own words to describe the issues that they faced when encountering pain through their work, and any poor treatment they suffered.

Example Questions used

1. To help GMB further, please tell us more about what you think has caused the pain:
2. How would you describe what is it like to work for Amazon?

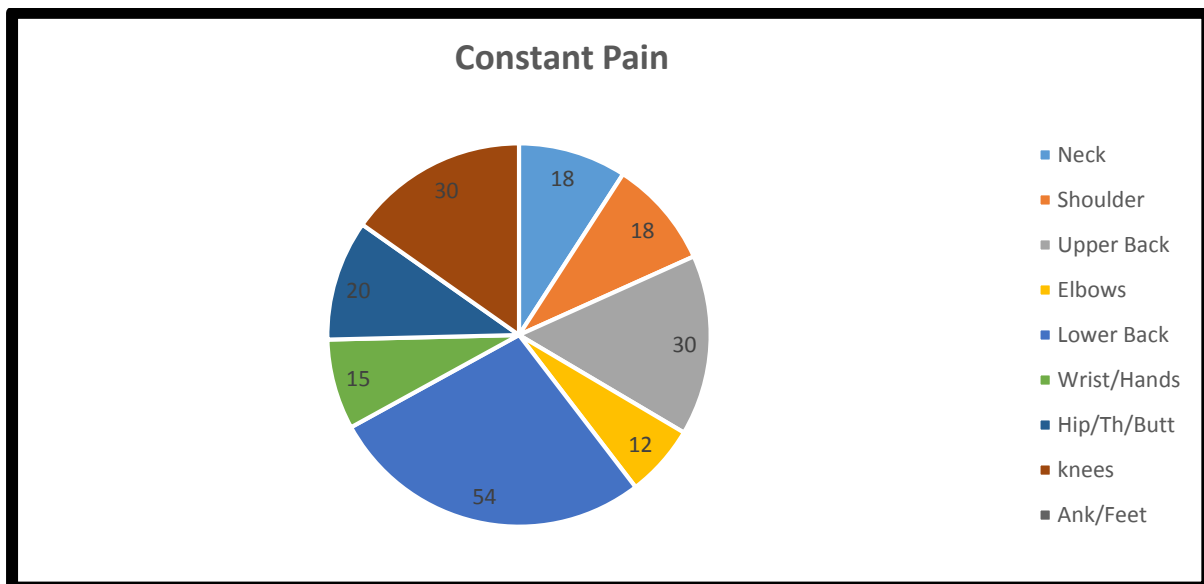
4. Constant Pain

Of those that responded that said they suffered with constant pain in certain parts of their body, these are covered in figure 2 and figure 3 below,

Fig 2

| Body Joint Constant Pain | in % |
|--------------------------|------|
| Neck | 18% |
| Shoulders | 18% |
| Upper Back | 30% |
| Elbows | 12% |
| Lower Back | 54% |
| Wrist/ Hands | 15% |
| Hips/Thighs/Buttocks | 30% |
| Knees | 30% |
| Ankles/ Feet | 30% |

Fig 3



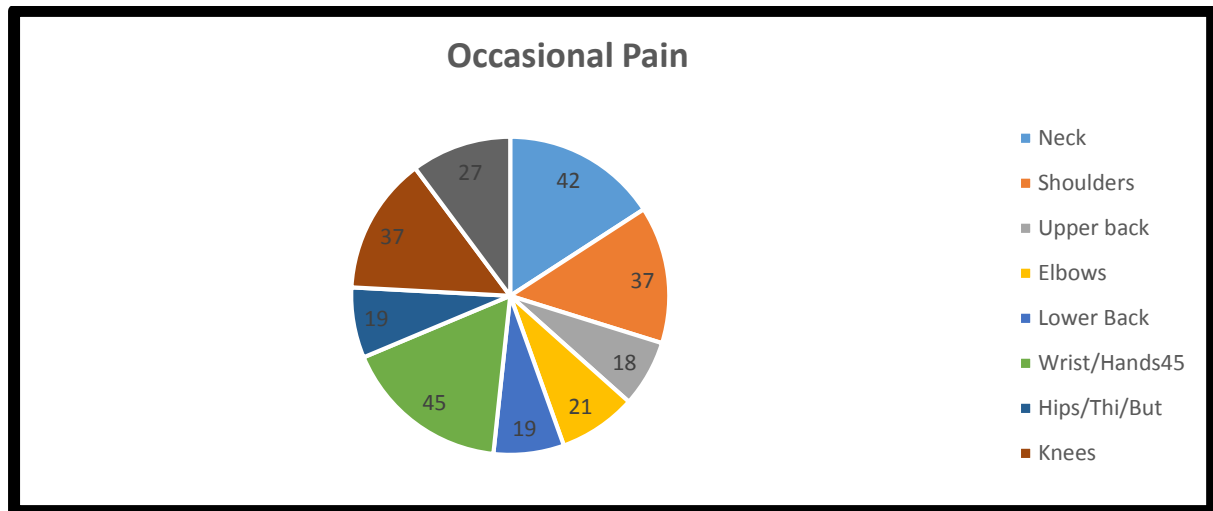
5. Occasional Pain

Of those that responded that said they suffered with Occasional pain in certain parts of their body, these are covered in figure 4 and figure 5 below,

Fig 4

| Body Joint Occasional Pain | in % |
|----------------------------|------|
| Neck | 42% |
| Shoulders | 37% |
| Upper Back | 18% |
| Elbows | 21% |
| Lower Back | 19% |
| Wrist/ Hands | 45% |
| Hips/Thighs/Buttocks | 19% |
| Knees | 37% |
| Ankles/ Feet | 27% |

Fig 5



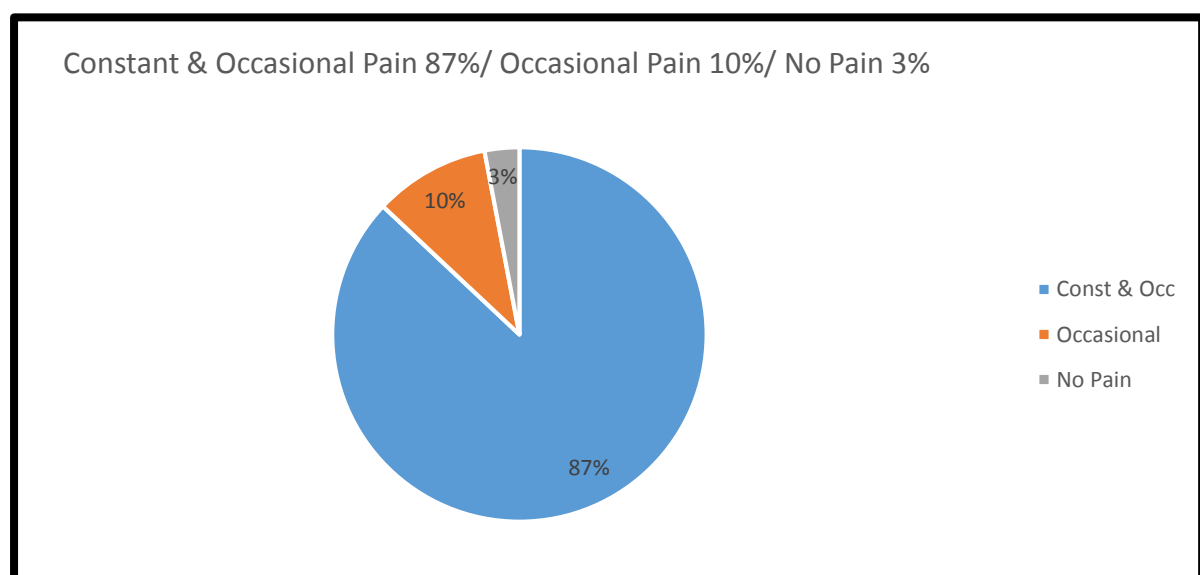
6. Constant and Occasional Pain

The table below shows the percentage of those Amazon associates that are GMB Union members who have indicated that they suffer Constant and Occasional pain for the various body joints, and those that only suffer Occasional pain, and those that indicated they do not suffer with any pain.

Fig 6

| Body Joints | % |
|----------------------------|-----|
| Constant & Occasional Pain | 87% |
| Occasional Pain | 10% |
| No Pain | 3% |

Fig 7



7. Q1 Tell us more about what you think has caused the pain.

We received some concise responses to our survey from GMB Union members who are Associates. There were many similarities in our member's written accounts, yet this survey was spread over a number of sites with geographical distance.

In the main, the most common problems identified in the surveys that are causing members injuries appear to be high pick rates, pace of work, heights, weights, constant bending, handling, over stretching, excessive walking, opening items, pulling heavy carts and totes, poor layout of site and fatigue.

In a number of cases that from the survey responses, there appears to be evidence, that Amazon outdated methods of working is causing unsafe, and injury to workers. In particular it appears that many Associates are now either suffering or starting to suffer with the onset of MSD's (Musculoskeletal Disorders). These are injuries that affect the body movement. In the USA the data gleaned on MSD's is now classed as one of the largest causes of workplace injuries, and one of the largest areas for worker compensation claims (source Bureau of labour Studies and Ergonomics Plus).

In part what our survey tells us, is that Amazon have a ruthless attitude to achieving high performance targets at a high pace, which places Associates at further risk of injury. When you combine high performance targets, with low levels of recovery time, and fewer breaks. This can also be a known contributory factor to heart disease. It is little wonder that fatigue is a major issue.

There is no supportive evidence to suggest that Amazon pick rates, and other warehouse functions were independently assessed and measured by qualified industrial engineers in their field.

Another area of concern that came out of the responses on the survey was the issue of dust in the warehouses, which is a cause for concern regards management of safety risks by Amazon managers. Cardboard dust can cause fire explosions. Cardboard dust can also cause respiratory problems, bronchitis, allergic reactions, migraine, conjunctivitis, sore throats and bacterial infections. Dust can also cause slips and falling hazards.

Many Amazon workplaces we surveyed showed that supervisors and managers are also quite happy to turn a blind eye to ignore assistance from Associates who require assistance on handling large and heavy items. This is placing Associates at further risk of injury and is a dangerous practice.

From many of the surveys returned there is a common theme running through them. That many of the Associates feel disrespected, threatened, fearful, abused, and are expected to hit unrealistic targets that their bodies cannot cope with.

GMB will make careful assessments, however it now looks likely that there may be personal injury compensation claims.

8. Amazon treatment of Pregnant Women

We have received shocking reports regards Amazon treatment of pregnant women. Where many women that are pregnant are expected to continue to hit their targets, and it is made difficult for them to have reasonable adjustments made to their work and environment. It was reported recently to a parliamentary group of MP's by a GMB member who works for Amazon that he knows someone who had a miscarriage, and that the company settled with the female Associate with a non-disclosure agreement.

9. Redacted selection of anonymised quotes from GMB Union Amazon associates to survey

Question No1 (To help GMB further, please tell us more about what you think has caused the pain)

"When I found I was pregnant, I asked my manager to be transferred to a different department. I was told that I was fine to continue picking, which involves various locations in the warehouse (which includes bending, stretching and moving a heavy cart, and walking miles). I was told I could not be transferred to a different department. After a while I told them I could not walk so many miles and I could not pick from low locations. I had a meeting with a safety manager and was also told "it's not what you want, it is what we decide". After sometime I went to see my manager again, the manager told me that most women are working on picking until their maternity leave. I know this is true, because I saw ladies with huge bumps picking."

"I am pregnant and made to stand and work for 10hrs without a chair, they constantly mention my idle time and they are telling me to work hard even though they know I am pregnant. I am feeling depressed when at work."

"In the past, large packages (LP) or serial shipping containers (SSC) were opened and 'decanted' onto carts. One manager though apparently decided that as people who did the 'decanting' were off task, the containers themselves must be loaded onto the carts or into cages. Many are much heavier than the standard limit of 15 kg. It is standard Amazon practice that we seek help to lift a box heavier than 15 kg. But people do not like to ask colleagues when those colleagues have their own targets to meet. I do not know why we cannot just go back to the old way of dealing with LP."

"Carts are heavy (to push them long distance, or to handle) and we can't ask help because this action isn't part of process but is idle time in manager's opinion. This is too difficult to prove, especially when the buffer is in X section and allocated aisle is in Y section and we should avoid the conveyor with heavy carts. So when they push us to rush and the carts are heavy it is impossible to respect safety/healthy rules. And long-time (all day long) doing the same process."

"Monotonous tasks, constant quick paced work tasks, repetitive actions, etc."

"The high volume of work, Amazon is increasing the target all the time and is forcing the workers to push themselves in order to achieve the target."

"They put pressure on us, they always increase our target (units per hour) and they stress us severely with idle time (example only 10 minutes for toilet, but from your workstation to toilet and back to workstation you have to lose at least 6-7 minutes)."

"The pressure from work about target, idle time. They are never satisfied with our work, they want from us to be better and better but they do not offer nothing in change."

"Slipped bulging disks caused at work."

"Working at Amazon. Boxes too big and heavy. Constant lifting and bending down to the floor."

"Heavy items I mean a lot more than 15kg!"

"Packing and lifting heavy items constantly every night."

"Standing/walking for 10 plus hours per shift at pace. Walking picking at pace to hit work rates. Wrist aches caused by lifting totes at pace. Everything at Amazon is at fast pace."

"Continuously lifting heavy items, walking around 20 miles a day. Bending all day to stow or pick items from the lower bins."

"Walking constantly up and down, bending down to bins. Short breaks. Idle time."

"Probably the high target that has been set, because we have to work fast and work pressure to make sure it is done, otherwise we are called upstairs (to see managers). Working at packing means I work a lot with my hands which is why I had a surgery."

"Accident at work due to an object on the floor."

"High targets; heavy carts or totes; pressure and stress to do with work and no time to follow healthy rules."

"Walking long distances, pushing heavy carts with lots of boxes on them that you have to scan individually. Repetitive crouching to stow/pick in bottom bins."

"The tools I work with i.e. the cart, are in a bad shape, that is, the wheels work hard or get stuck. The weight of the cart adds to this problem which no one even solve, even if the manager and general manager of Amazon know."

"I have the shoulder pain for a few months. I had physio but didn't help too much. I damaged my back and right shoulder muscles doing stow by trying to hit the rates around 280 items/hour. The same movements (repetitive) make the pain very bad."

"I have to move at work all the time. Pushing cart, squatting to pick items from bottom shelves, lifting heavy items."

"Repetitive strain. Spondylosis. Arthritis. 10 1/2 hour shifts over last 10 years."

"Cause of pain is you have to work hard, to push heavy carts, and pick up heavy boxes."

"Even if the weight of the items is light, then repeatedly bending body up and down causes back pain - especially when we do this 10 hrs daily."

"I think the pain has been caused by the intensive work. Stress and pressure to do more, faster and better makes you work harder so there is no time to think about your health."

"Long working hours, short breaks."

"I had been having back pain for a month or so, then I had an accident at work and I have found my back is worse."

"Long hours standing, lifting heavy stuff, and walking when working on picking."

"Every day no matter whether at work or home, anything I do hurts. Walking for too long hurts."

"Lifting totes, boxes. From standing I had problems with my knees. After work I was sitting and resting and I didn't have that feeling that I am resting actually."

10. Redacted selection of anonymised quotes from GMB Union Amazon associates to survey Question No2. (How would you describe what is it like to work for Amazon?)

There were many responses to our survey question No2 from GMB Union members who are Associates at Amazon. These surveys were taken from a number of sites, to see if there was a pattern of unsafe working, and poor treatment of Amazon Associates across the Amazon estate in the UK. The results of the survey responses published shows that indeed there is a managerial culture, which fosters a pattern of poor behaviour towards Associates. What comes out of these survey returns, is that Associates feel they are treated with disrespect, and in some cases with disdain. It is apparent there is a pattern of aggressive and arrogant behaviour towards Associates, which is designed to create a climate of fear.

The comments from Associates in response to our survey help give a further insight to how things have not changed in Amazon Fulfilment Centres, since our first report published in 2014. In many cases the problems with poor treatment and disrespect appear to have got worse. The responses from Associates give the impression that working for Amazon is not the modern go ahead company that it portrays. In fact those that responded, give a perception that working for Amazon is getting worse and is dehumanising. Along with the serious H&S issues mentioned in previous paragraphs of this report, working for Amazon has a potentially adverse effect on associates mental health and their health and well-being in general.

See comments below,

Dehumanising you are a number not a person if you have health issues the Amazon way is to pay you off and replace you with temporary workers with less terms and conditions

Managers more concerned about hitting rates than people!

Not everyone can handle it. Pressure and stress makes you much more tired.

A lot of stress, 'cos of disciplinary threats!

Not enough toilets (Rugely)

You have to work hard for your money

Not the best place to work, you are just a number to them!

People are overtired due to constantly being rushed and threatened or being fined if they won't improve their performance. Stress level is high. They ask people why they were late 40 sec!!

Treat us like slaves, Robots!!

Living In a Prison!

We are threatened for any reason

Always under pressure!!

Difficult & soul
destroying due to
the way you are
treated and
spoken to
sometimes.

Too much work
and too little
money. Every day
you're stressed to
make your target.

A modern day slave
camp, overworked
and underpaid

Soul destroying!!
Due to the way
you are treated
and spoken to.

Working long hours. I
used to work 8 shifts,
that was bearable.
Now it is 10.5hrs,
peak time 11.5hrs
plus an additional day

After 10/11 hours of working you come
home but you are not resting, tired. They
said we have 3 days off, but 2 days you need
to sleep, rest. So noisy to be here, at the
moment we don't have earplugs.

Treat people without respect, I
can't be proud to work for such
company

Not enough
toilets for a
big place
(Rugely) only
3!!

Amazon have
no respect for
us!

Stress & Pressure
discrimination/favouritism
Does not follow H&S rules

Big targets,
impossible

I am feeling
depressed
when at work



**Just the
beginning**
– *GMB Union*

#1u