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An internal petition signed by 640 Amazon tech and corporate employees is asking the company to raise its emissions goals and address the disproportionate environmental harms its logistics empire leaves on Black,

Latino, Indigenous and immigrant neighborhoods where its warehouses are often concentrated.

The petition was organized by the influential employee group Amazon Employees for Climate Justice, many of whose members receive stock with their positions, after Amazon persuaded the Securities and Exchange Commission [to bar including a proposal](#) from the group at the company's shareholder meeting Wednesday. Amazon is the second largest employer in the country, with [over 1 million](#) workers, including Whole Foods employees and its vast fulfillment and delivery workers.

“As employees, we are alarmed that Amazon's pollution is disproportionately concentrated in communities of color,” reads the petition, which was obtained by NBC News. “We want to be proud of where we work. A company that lives up to its statements about racial equity and closes the racial equity gaps in its operations is a critical part of that.”



The group is also asking Amazon to offer detailed research about how its logistics and delivery operations pose disproportionate environmental and health hazards for communities of color and to prioritize those communities in its emissions reduction strategy. Amazon is [committed](#) to neutralizing its

carbon emissions by 2040, but the group is asking the company to raise its goal to zero emissions by 2030, when climate science [estimates](#) have determined that global warming could lead to the irreversible loss of fragile ecosystems.

“We are committed to finding innovative solutions to reduce emissions and are transforming our transportation network with investments that help us deliver packages more sustainably to support the communities where we operate,” said Brad Glasser, an Amazon spokesperson. “As part of this work, we co-founded the Climate Pledge — a commitment to be net-zero carbon across our business operations 10 years ahead of the Paris Agreement.”



IMAGE: The Spheres at Amazon headquarters in Seattle (David Ryder / Getty Images)

The Amazon employee climate group submitted its shareholder proposal because the employees were awarded stock as part of their compensation. Amazon employees first used their stock to present their concerns about the company’s climate impact to their [fellow shareholders in 2019](#). While their proposals didn’t pass, it was the first time workers in the technology

industry used their position as owners of company stock to urge their employer to change its business practices.

Dangerous air

Climate change advocates and policymakers have raised concerns about the pollution created by the thousands of diesel trucks, airplanes and vans Amazon uses to transport orders through its vast network of warehouses to fulfill its two-day delivery promise. About 80 percent of those warehouses are in ZIP codes with higher populations of Black, Latino and Indigenous people compared to neighboring ZIP codes in the same metropolitan areas, according to the Amazon employee [group's research](#) with data collected by the logistics consulting firm [MWPVL International](#).

As online shopping increased with the rise of the coronavirus pandemic, communities such as Southern California's Inland Empire have borne the brunt of the environmental impact from increased pollution, the People's Collective for Environmental Justice said in a [report](#) last month. The group found that the increase in warehouses in the area correlated with an overall rise in poor air quality and subsequent health problems, including asthma, bronchitis and cancer, that hit communities of color the hardest. Amazon is the largest employer in the region, with 19 facilities.

Yet, the company is expanding its operations in the Inland Empire with an enormous logistics hub at the San Bernardino airport. The 700,000-square-foot facility is expected to bring 26 additional flights and 500 truck trips a day, which an [environmental assessment](#) by the airport authority found would collectively emit 1 ton of air pollution daily. Although the assessment ultimately found that the hub would meet federal requirements, Xavier Becerra, the state attorney general, [sued the Federal Aviation Administration](#) and the airport authority last year alleging that the project is unlawful and that it will cause significant harm to local air quality. The city of San Bernardino is 65 percent Latino, according to the [census](#).



IMAGE: Amazon Air Regional Air Hub at San Bernardino International Airport (Watchara Phomicinda / Orange County Register via ZUMA)

Glasser, the Amazon spokesperson, said the company is installing 10 solar rooftops in the Inland Empire and investing in large-scale renewable energy projects to move its operations to 100 percent renewable energy by 2025, five years ahead of the company's goals.

The 640 Amazon workers who signed the petition are also asking the company to deploy its electric vehicles in areas most affected by the pollution its delivery operations create. "An electric delivery truck in a Seattle suburb doesn't help a kid developing asthma living and going to school near a major shipping center, like in the Inland Empire," Selene Xenia, an engineering manager at Amazon who is part of the employee climate group, said in an interview.

Some of Amazon's new electric vehicles are [scheduled](#) to be tested in Los Angeles for the first time this year.

Stock options

The Amazon employee climate group helped usher in a wave of climate activism at some of the country's most recognizable technology companies. Thousands of workers at companies such as Google, Twitter and Microsoft joined Amazon employees in [walking out](#) of their offices in 2019 to press their employers to do more to tackle climate change.

Shareholder proposals related to climate change began proliferating in the U.S. in 2014, according to Institutional Shareholder Services, an international corporate governance and investor advisory firm. Last year, shareholders passed five climate-related proposals at companies such as DollarTree, J.B. Hunt Transport, Phillips 66 and Chevron.

Maximilian Horster, managing director and head of climate solutions at Institutional Shareholder Services, said all companies need to make an environmental agenda a bigger priority.

“When you look at the magnitude of climate change, 10 or so companies' adopting a resolution is not enough,” he said. “Shareholder resolutions are part of the solution. But they are not the only one, because there are only so many resolutions out there.”

IMAGE: Amazon employees rally in Seattle (Jason Redmond / AFP - Getty Images file)

Still, Amazon employee climate activism has caught the attention of company executives. Tim Bray, a former vice president at Amazon who [resigned last year](#), citing a “culture of toxicity,” signed on to a petition from the group in 2019 calling on the company to reduce its carbon footprint and cut its ties to the oil and gas industry. Amazon also fired two of the climate group's core organizers last year, Emily Cunningham and Maren Costa, citing violations of company policy that prohibits employees from commenting publicly about its business. The National Labor Relations Board determined last month that [their firings were illegal](#).

Amazon says it disagrees with the labor board's ruling. “We support every employee's right to criticize their employer's working conditions, but that does not come with blanket immunity against our internal policies, all of which are lawful,” said Glasser, the Amazon spokesperson.

A day before the Amazon Employees for Climate Justice's organized walkout in 2019, CEO Jeff Bezos announced plans to deploy a fleet of electric vans by 2024 and the company's goal of going carbon neutral by

2040. Employees still walked out, because their demands called for stronger action. The company denies that its climate pledge was made in response to the employees' demands.

“I believe that tech workers have a responsibility to speak up about these issues and push their employer,” said Xenia, the Amazon employee.

“Amazon would not exist without its employees. We are its greatest asset.

“It is not always easy to get leadership to respond or acknowledge quickly. But the more we speak up, the more it is clear that we are heard and things do change.”

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