

Austin McEwen Estate Claims Amazon Failed To Heed Tornado Warning

by Sanford Schmidt

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EDWARDSVILLE - The estate of a popular former hockey player has filed suit against Amazon, Contegra Construction Co. and Tristar properties, claiming the companies failed to heed a National Weather Service warning.



“Take shelter now,” the weather service allegedly said at 8:06 p.m. on Dec. 10. The warehouse, known as a “fulfillment center,” was destroyed at 8:28 p.m., killing Austin McEwen of Edwardsville and “obliterating” the warehouse, according to the suit.

The suit claims the weather service began issuing weather warnings at 3:44 a.m. on Dec. 9. The warning included thunderstorms and the chance of a tornado.

McEwen was not an Amazon employee, but an independent “delivery service contractor.” He was one of six people killed in the storm. Edwardsville is prone to tornadoes and has been the site of eleven of the twisters since 2000, the suit claims.

“Defendant Amazon knew or should have known and foreseen that the subject fulfillment center was in an area that could sustain devastating weather and or a tornado on Dec. 10, 2021,” according to the filing.

The suit claims that Amazon failed to evacuate the building and kept people working, failed to monitor the weather, failed to operate the center without a basement, and directed workers to take shelter in a bathroom, which was not a safe shelter, and other shortcomings.

Austin McEwen’s mother, Alice McEwen is the administrator of her son’s estate.

The suit claims the company failed in several areas, including having a proper alarm, failure to have a storm shelter, and failure to timely inform workers that a tornado was approaching.

The suit also named Contrega, the company that built the center.

The builder failed to build a warehouse with a basement shelter and built the center with a “tilt-up” wall that was prone to collapse during high winds.

The plaintiff is asking for at least \$50,000 from each defendant. The plaintiffs are represented by Jack J. Casciato and John Malec of the Clifford law offices in Chicago.

McEwen was a popular athlete and outdoorsman. He played hockey for the Edwardsville and the McKendree College hockey team.