

Starbucks closes location that was the first to unionize in Seattle

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Seattle, November 25 (RHC)--Starbucks is closing the store in Seattle where employees were the first to vote to form a union in the chain's home city. A company spokesperson cited safety concerns, saying that "unfortunately, despite several mitigating efforts, safety and security incidents at our Broadway and

Denny store have continued to escalate.” The spokesperson said that the store will be closing to customers on December 9th.

It’s not the first time Starbucks has pointed to safety concerns to explain a closure. “We are beginning to close stores,” because of safety issues, interim CEO Howard Schultz said in a video posted to Twitter in July. “This is just the beginning. There are going to be many more.”

“This is the most clear-cut case of retaliation this company has shown closing a union store yet,” Starbucks Workers United said in a statement on the closure. “Starbucks and Howard Schultz are playing petty games with worker’s lives. They lack respect not only for the rights of their workers, but for the law of this country.”

The location is the fourth union store in Seattle to be shut down by the company since July, according to the union, which said it will file an unfair labor practice charge against Starbucks over the latest closure of the Broadway and Denny location.

The union has filed hundreds of unfair labor practice complaints against the company since last year, and the National Labor Relations Board has issued its own complaints against Starbucks as well. In June, workers claimed a location in Ithaca, New York was being closed in retaliation for unionizing.

The Starbucks spokesperson said, regarding the Seattle closure announcement, that “we will bargain with the union in good faith to discuss the impact of this decision on our partners – including opportunities to transfer to other area stores.”

Efforts to unionize Starbucks locations have been gaining steam since December 2021, when a store in Buffalo became the first to unionize. As of two weeks ago, 259 stores have voted to unionize and 57 have voted against organizing, according to the NLRB. Starbucks had nearly 10,000 company-operated stores in North America as of October 2021, according to its most recent annual report.

Last week, Starbucks workers across the country went on a one-day strike to protest what they see as retaliation for unionizing efforts. No new contracts have been negotiated even at stores which voted to unionize nearly a year ago.

The Starbucks unionizing effort has inspired employees across retail to organize their own workplaces. Workers at some Apple, Chipotle and Home Depot stores have launched union campaigns.

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