

Tesco warns of Christmas panic buying if driver shortage persists

Kalyeena Makortoff · 6 hrs ago



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Tesco has warned government officials that empty supermarket shelves caused by a national shortage of HGV drivers could lead to panic buying across the UK in the lead up to Christmas.



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“Our concern is that the pictures of empty shelves will get 10 times worse by Christmas and then we’ll get panic buying,” Andrew Woolfenden, Tesco’s head of distribution and fulfilment in the UK, told a Cabinet Office meeting last week.

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what's this?

Despite offering bonuses worth £1,000 since the summer, Tesco – which is the UK’s largest supermarket – is still facing a shortfall of 800 drivers, Woolfenden said, adding that the company had struggled to hire more drivers than it had lost to rival firms in recent months.

Co-op warned last week that shoppers were likely to suffer price hikes and a more limited range in the run-up to Christmas as a result of driver shortages. “There won’t be the same level of choice as there has been in the past,” the Co-op chief executive, Steve Murrells, said.

Shoppers would be able to get everything they needed for Christmas and their weekly shop, he added, but things such as the range of pack sizes on some products

would be limited.

While the government has advised firms to invest in domestic workers, Tesco has now joined a chorus of businesses calling on ministers to make it easier to recruit staff from abroad to fill the gap. Woolfenden told Cabinet officials that attempts to recruit people from the same pool of drivers in the UK was like “moving deckchairs around,” according to comments first reported by ITV.



© Photograph: Peter Byrne/PA Empty shelves in the meat aisle of a branch of Tesco in Liverpool, UK.

It follows an exodus of workers linked to Covid and Brexit, which has put pressure on supply chains across the UK.

Industry groups, including Logistics UK and the British Retail Consortium, have since called on the government to provide temporary UK visas to EU truck drivers to help address the issue, while the CBI has warned that a failure to act quickly could put the post-pandemic recovery at risk.

A Tesco spokesperson said: "We have good availability, with deliveries arriving at our stores and distribution centres across the UK every day. While the industry-wide shortage of HGV drivers has led to some distribution challenges, we're working hard to address these and to plan for the months ahead, so that customers can get everything they need."

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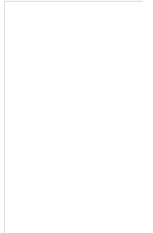
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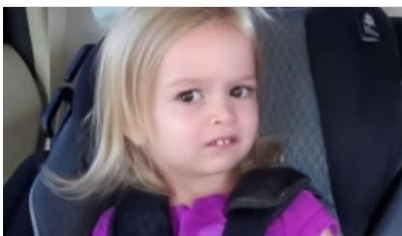
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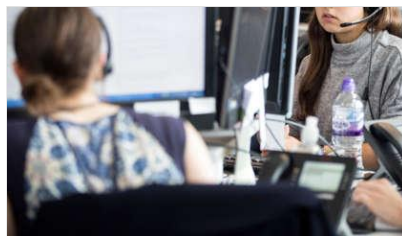
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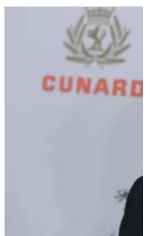
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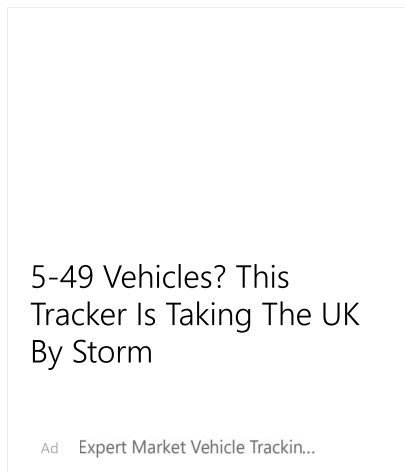
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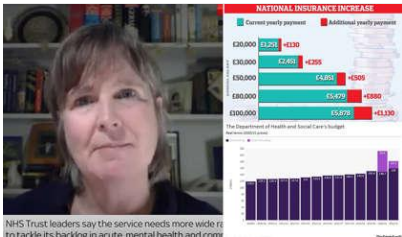
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