

Covid-19 lockdown 12-hr workday in Rajasthan factories, Punjab may follow

Last Updated at April 14, 2020 03:05 IST

- **State invokes powers under Factories Act to extend maximum hours to 12 from eight earlier; other states may follow as move is aimed to ensure production isn't impacted due to reduced workforce.**
- **This will be applicable for all the exempted categories of industries that will be allowed to work through notifications issued by the central and the state governments.**

As industries prepare to restart operations in a staggered manner in the second phase of the lockdown, the Rajasthan government has extended working hours at factories from a maximum of 8 hours to 12 hours a day to ensure production doesn't take a hit with a limited workforce. The template is set to be followed by other states such as Punjab.

Rajasthan has used special powers under the Factories Act of 1948, which could be invoked during a public emergency, to make these changes for the next three months. This will apply to all the manufacturing activities permitted for operations.

"To achieve the dual objective of restoring full supply of essential goods and ensure a minimum presence of people in manufacturing and distribution facilities, it is allowed that the usual eight hours of working per day according to the Factories Act, 1948, be exempted for next three months to allow maximum of 12 hours working per day," Niraj Kumar Pawan, Rajasthan labour, employment and skill secretary, said in an April 11 order.

This will be applicable for all the exempted categories of industries that will be allowed to work through notifications issued by the central and the state governments.

According to the notification, the additional four hours of work will be counted as 'overtime' for which, Pawan told Business Standard, the worker will be paid double the wages in normal working hours.

"This (move) would allow in running the majority of operations for six days with a reduction of close to 33 per cent of people passing through the facility on a daily basis," the notification stated.

Though the central government will not amend the Factories Act, 1948 to make this change, some state governments may follow the footsteps of Rajasthan. Punjab Principal Secretary (Labour) VK Janjua said that the state will also make a similar move in the days to come.

Making Corporate India Comply

“The central government needn’t issue a notification to extend the working hours under the Factories Act, as most factories fall under the jurisdiction of the states. So, if they want they can extend working hours through a notification,” a senior government official said, requesting anonymity.

According to a top government official, the central government is contemplating creating a system for issuing transportation passes to employers and workers so that they do not face problems while commuting for work.

The Confederation of Indian Industry has asked the labour and employment ministry to ensure the availability of local transportation, to “ensure safety of every worker”.

It has even offered to get back migrant workers who have returned to their villages through private vehicles, given the adequate permissions are given in time.

According to sources, the Central government may look to give incentives to the migrant workers to return to work, apart from telling industries to assure workers of guaranteed and timely payment of income for work during the lockdown period. A special insurance coverage for those who test positive for Covid-19 is also on the table.

To consider a relief package for migrant workers, the Central government had asked the states to collect their details, including bank account and Aadhaar number, by April 11. But some states faced challenges in collecting data.

“Some workers do not have either bank accounts or mobile numbers, and in some cases both. This was an issue flagged by the states. So, we have advised them to send the data they have been able to gather,” a union labour ministry official said.