

# Employers confused as work from home order begins

By **Faye Kwan** - October 22, 2020 10:15 AM



*From today, only 10% of senior staff from the finance, administration, legal and IT departments in a company are allowed to work in the office.*

PETALING JAYA: Employer groups have called for clarification of the rules under the work from home order, which comes into effect today in areas under the conditional movement control order (CMCO).

The government has announced that employees involved in management and supervision work in the industrial and public sectors must work from home throughout the CMCO period.

It has also announced that 10% of senior staff from the finance, administration, legal and IT departments in a company were allowed to work in their offices from 10am to 2pm for a maximum of three days a week.

Workers from red zones who are required to work in the office are encouraged to undergo swab tests for Covid-19, with costs borne by Socso.

Malaysian Employers Federation executive director Shamsuddin Bardan said there was still “lots of confusion” over the swab test regulations and employers were unsure whether all workers in red zones or only those in management and supervisor roles had to get tested.

Although swab tests are not mandatory, Shamsuddin told FMT it was unclear whether the tests would still be free if employees were required to get tested a second time.

He also asked for clarity regarding the 10% limit and the government’s definition of management and supervisory positions.

“If there are only five managerial people in a company, one person already accounts for 20% of the category allowed to work,” he said. “The 10% rule is not feasible if the company is small. This can lead to operational issues.”

Malaysian International Chamber of Commerce and Industry executive director Shaun Edward Cheah expressed similar sentiments, saying the government’s regulations were often unclear and open to interpretation.

“They change all the time,” he said. “It sounds like they make them up as they go along and it seems like there’s no briefing to the enforcement agencies beforehand.

“As far as we know, employees are allowed to travel to work with just a company letter. However, police insisted that one member of our staff also show his employee pass. Not every company provides its workers with an employee card.”

Although he supported the government’s decision to reduce the number of people at the workplace, Cheah urged Putrajaya to better communicate with enforcement authorities to ensure people were allowed to travel to work without any hassle.

Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers president Soh Thian Lai said his organisation was grateful for the flexibility shown in allowing management and supervisory staff to continue working in the office since not all companies were prepared to enable all non-production staff to work remotely.

However, he said the 10% limit for senior staff may pose challenges for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SME) with small numbers of employees,

especially if the CMCO were to be extended.

He said there were also concerns about the swab tests for employees because the time taken to conduct the tests and wait for the results might affect business operations.

Michael Kang, president of the SME Association of Malaysia, said many businesses had been kept on their toes by the daily updates on movement restrictions and the work from home order.

"There are new things everyday, but we have no choice but to comply with the SOPs if we want to reduce the number of Covid-19 cases while taking care of the economy at the same time," he said.