

Beating the lockdown blues the Ramco Cements way

N Ramakrishnan Chennai | Updated on May 01, 2020 | Published on May 01, 2020



Even when it's not business as usual, the Chennai-headquartered Ramco Cements has kept its plants and grinding units in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh operating, albeit at a lower capacity, thanks to some planning and coordination.

Ramco Cements has an installed capacity of about 16.5 million tonnes, with integrated plants at three locations in Tamil Nadu and one each in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, and four grinding units – two in Tamil Nadu and one each in West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh.

According to AV Dharmakrishnan, CEO, Ramco Cements, even before the nationwide lockdown was announced with effect from March 24, the company had started the process of social distancing and personal hygiene at its plants. At the corporate office in Chennai, employees were told to avoid public transport. The infrastructure for working from home was also put in place.

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The company has an enterprise software that allows the top management to view and monitor operations from their laptops, which is what Dharmakrishnan is doing now from his residence as the company's plants operate.

Dharmakrishnan said once the management ascertained from the authorities that continuous process industries were allowed to function, it took up maintenance of the equipment and then started the integrated plants even though the cement or clinker could not be despatched. The company's silos were nearly empty and re-starting the plants was important.

Geographic proximity

An advantage for Ramco Cements — as with most other cement companies — is that a majority of the staff at integrated plants live within the company's housing colony. All the managerial personnel live in company quarters and nearly 85 per cent of the workers, too, reside in the colonies. Workers on contract come from nearby villages. Their parameters were regularly monitored.

All the employees were fed in the factory canteen, as also the drivers and workers engaged by the company's contractors. The temperature of the drivers was recorded at periodic intervals and, within the parking area, they were made to park their trucks with sufficient space between the vehicles.

Dharmakrishnan said the company was getting excellent support from the State governments and the district administration. Ramco Cements was even able to ship two export consignments of about 9,000 tonnes to Maldives, after all precautions had been taken.

In the grinding units, the staff are asked to work in two batches. They are accommodated in company guest houses or community halls. One batch worked for a week at a stretch and then got a week off, when the next batch took over.

Logistics protocol

Cement being a logistics-intensive business, Dharmakrishnan said, the company advised its logistics providers on the protocol to be followed. The lorries were disinfected each time they came into the factory, drivers were provided free food in the canteen and sometimes even given packed food for their journey.

Since all the stockists and dealers were closed, the company worked with its dealers to find out which construction sites required cement and despatched the commodity directly to those sites, said Dharmakrishnan.

He said he expected a good pick-up in rural demand once the lockdown was completely lifted. And, Ramco Cements, he added, was prepared to cater to this demand.

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