

In Chennai, factory workers seek heat allowance

TNN | Apr 7, 2016, 05.52 AM IST

CHENNAI: As the temperature rises, companies with factories near the city are feeling the heat. Factory workers are demanding a "heat allowance" along the lines of a hardship allowance paid to people who work in hostile conditions.

"We have asked the management to consider paying employees a heat allowance," said union representatives of Renault Nissan, which has a plant in Oragadam. The management, it is learnt, is considering the demand but hasn't taken a call yet.

Heat allowances aren't new. Hyundai, which has a manufacturing plant in Sriperumbudur, pays a similar allowance to workers in the factory foundry. "We have been paying an average of Rs 500 per person per month," a Hyundai official said. Foundry processes are high-heat operations where metals are melted at 500 degrees Celsius.

Factories near Chennai are trying to keep their employees cool despite the early onset of summer. "We never used to allow employee bus shuttle inside the factory. The buses would drop them at the main gates. Now, we have asked the drivers to drop employees outside their duty shop floor," said a Hyundai spokesperson. He said the canteen diet has been changed to include green salads and fluid-rich vegetables. "Last year, we served buttermilk, lemon juice and other hydrating items only in May. We've already started offering them this year," he said.

Chennai witnessed its hottest February in three years, and March was uncomfortable with the met department predicting "warmer than normal" temperatures this summer. Private weather forecaster Accuweather on Wednesday for Chennai said, "its 96 degrees fahrenheit, 35.5 degrees celsius) but feels like 111 degrees (43.8 degrees celsius)."

At Renault Nissan's Oragadam factory, employees are served oral rehydration salts on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and lemon

juice and buttermilk every day. "The company is focused on increasing the number of air changers on the shop floor to make the working zones more comfortable and bring the workplace temperature 3 to 4 degrees below the ambient temperature. Temperatures are maintained at 26 degree celsius," a Nissan spokesperson said.

Even air-conditioned factories are taking extra precautions. "The severe heat outside the factory makes all us all vulnerable. We serve buttermilk to all employees before they enter the shop floor," said Josh Foulger, India head of Foxconn, which has an air-conditioned phone assembly unit at Sri City in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh.