Sony suspends some production at more Japan plants

The Associated Press

Sony Corp. said Tuesday it is suspending some production at plants in Japan that make popular consumer electronics like digital cameras and televisions due to shortages of components and raw materials following the March 11 earthquake.

Operations at plants in Shizuoka, Aichi, Gifu and Oita were suspended through to the end of March. Those factories are involved in the production of broadcast equipment, camcorders, digital cameras, lenses for digital single-lens reflex cameras, cell phones, LCD TVs, microphones and headphones.

"The company intends to resume manufacturing operations at each of those sites as it secures raw materials and components," it said in a statement on its website.

Sony, a world leader in consumer electronics and entertainment, also said it was resuming operations at some plants where production had ground to a halt after the 9.0-magnitude earthquake and tsunami which devastated Japan's northeast.

A plant in Tochigi prefecture that manufactures high-power lithium ion secondary batteries partially resumed operations Tuesday. On March 15, four days after the quake, a separate factory in Tochigi resumed partial operations. A plant in Saitama, north of Tokyo, resumed full production on the same day, the company said.

Sony said it was intermittently resuming operations Tuesday at a plant in Chiba prefecture that manufactures Blu-ray disc recorders and home audio systems, depending on the availability of power. The plant sustained no direct damage from the quake but had suspended operations due to power outages.

Inspections and repairs were under way but operations were still suspended at plants in prefectures hardest-hit by the earthquake: Miyagi, which suffered the vast majority of deaths; and Fukushima, where a nuclear complex began leaking radiation after it was severely damaged.

The Miyagi plants produce magnetic tapes, Blu-ray discs, optical devices, IC cards, and semiconductor lasers. Plants in Fukushima produce lithium ion secondary batteries. A plant in quake-affected Ibaraki prefecture that makes CDs and DVDs was also not operating but was undergoing repair.

All other manufacturing sites in Japan are "currently maintaining normal operations and plan to continue such operations," Sony said. But interruptions could occur depending on the availability of raw materials, components and power.

The company, which makes the Vaio personal computer and PlayStation 3 video

game console, said none of its employees were killed in the magnitude quake — the worst in Japan's history — and the enormous tsunami that followed.

The vast array of products made by Tokyo-based Sony — like its PlayStation 3 game console — have made the company famous worldwide with consumers. The iconic company became a household name with its Walkman portable music players in the 1980s, which transformed the electronics industry.

All told, police estimate around 18,400 people died from the quake and tsunami. More than 15,000 deaths are likely in Miyagi, the prefecture that took the full impact of the wave.

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