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Fiat Chrysler gets waiver to retrieve parts from virus-hit supplier in Italy

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REUTERS/Guglielmo Mangiapane

A policeman wearing a face mask warns a driver on the road between Codogno and Casalpusterlengo, which has been closed by the Italian government due to a coronavirus outbreak.

MILAN -- Fiat Chrysler Automobiles obtained permission to retrieve critical parts from a supplier in an area in northern Italy locked down following the country's coronavirus outbreak.

Three of FCA's car plants in Italy and a joint venture van factory with PSA Group were threatened with production stops because MTA Advanced Automotive Solutions could not deliver essential electronics parts.

MTA's headquarters and main production center in Codogno, 60 km (37 miles) southeast of Milan, has been closed since Monday after the town became the center of a coronavirus outbreak responsible for 12 deaths and more than 370 confirmed cases of the virus.

Italian authorities ordered factories in Codogno and nine nearby towns to suspend non-essential activities to help prevent the spread of the virus. People are not allowed to enter or leave the towns.

MTA said FCA's plants in Mirafiori, Cassino and Melfi and its Sevel joint venture with PSA would run out of MTA parts without regular parts deliveries. Renault, BMW, PSA Group and Jaguar Land Rover could also be hit, the supplier said.

MTA CEO Antonio Falchetti said FCA obtained permission to enter the locked-down area because of the threat to the automaker's production. He said FCA sent a truck from an outside contractor to collect the parts after the Italian government's local representative signed a waiver.

An FCA spokesperson confirmed that a waiver was obtained allowing the automaker access the MTA plant. FCA currently does not envisage any plant closures in Italy due to the virus outbreak, the spokesperson said.

A Renault spokeswoman confirmed that MTA was a supplier. The automaker's supply and purchasing department is evaluating the situation, the spokeswoman told *Automotive News Europe*.

BMW is monitoring the situation and has yet to encounter difficulties finding needed parts, a spokeswoman told the *New York Times*.

Restart request

Falchetti said he has asked Italian authorities for permission to reopen the Codogno plant with 60 out of its 600 workers to restart production. The 60 workers live in the restricted area.

MTA said the return would take place on a large covered area and would be subject to daily verification of the health status of each worker. MTA has already dealt with the virus in its Chinese production plant in Shanghai, and "therefore knows all the procedures necessary to continue producing in total safety of its workers," it said.

The authorities are still evaluating the request, Falchetti told *Automotive News Europe*.

MTA's Codogno plant produces low-tech electrical components such as fuse boxes. According to MTA, the parts they make for FCA are single-sourced.

FCA's only plant in Europe to close following the virus outbreak is in Serbia where Fiat 500L was halted due to a shortage of audio parts from China. The plant is scheduled to restart production on Thursday.