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Firms face hefty fines for operating during hottest hours Sizzling GCC states issue ban on outdoor work



Temperatures in the GCC can reach up to 50 degrees centigrade during the summer months

DUBAI (Danielle Kamar)

Scorching hot Gulf States, Bahrain and the UAE, issued Wednesday a ban on outdoor construction work during the hottest time of the day in an effort to curb accidents and illness of the region's already underpaid and overworked laborers.

Bahrain's Ministry of Labor said construction sites will have to shut down from midday to 4 p.m. until the end of September and companies that violate the ban face a fine of up to \$700 for every laborer on site.

Around 500 companies in Bahrain were taken to court last year for violating the summer ban, Bahrain's Gulf Daily News reported. This year around 50 inspectors are set to patrol sites making sure companies are implementing the ban.

"Now that this is the third year in a row the ban is being enforced, we would imagine most of the employers are aware of the issue" a Bahraini ministry official told the Gulf News Daily, adding "we are also aware that in spite of the ban, there will be some violators so we wish to urge them not to break the law."

Some companies are exempt from the ban for technical reasons, but are still asked to provide health facilities for workers with first-aid, air-conditions, sunshades and cold water.

The restriction has already been implemented in the neighboring state of Qatar since June 15.

The desert climate in the Arab states of the GCC means the summer heat hits up to 50 degrees Celsius (122 F) and on most days with up to 100 percent humidity, making conditions outside unbearable.

UAE ban

The UAE also issued a summer ban and Labor Minister Saqr Gobash said it would be effective from 12:30 to 3:00 p.m. until the end of August.

The ban was first put in place in 2007 and according to press reports site accidents have dropped 50 percent during July and August compared to the 2006 numbers.

The week before the ban was legislated, Ataf Rabih Mohammed from Dubai Hospital's emergency registration said the hospital had more accidents on site cases than heat exhaustion in workers.

"Since last week, in my registration only one case," we had "only 50 cases" of workers with on site accidents that week, the number is usually higher, Mohammed told Al Arabiya.

The UAE is slapping a hefty fine of more than \$2,000 (AED 10,000) and no work permits processed for three months for first time offenders of the ban.

A second offense results in a \$5,000 fine and a no work permit process for six months. In the case of a third offense, the firm will be fined \$8,000 and will have none of its work permits processed for a year.