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COVID-19 Circuit Breaker Measures: Suspension of Activities at Workplace

Introduction

On 3 April 2020, the Singapore Multi-Ministry Taskforce announced that an elevated set of safe distancing measures will be in place from **7 April 2020 until 4 May 2020**. These enhanced measures aim to act as a circuit breaker to control the spread of COVID-19 in Singapore by minimising movements and interaction in public and private places. Notably, there will be a suspension of activities at all workplace premises, subject to certain exemptions for selected essential services ("**Essential Services**").

In this Update, we highlight the scope and key aspects of the measures requiring the suspension of activities at all workplace premises ("**Suspension**").

Scope of Suspension

Entities which carry out activities identified as Essential Services and their related supply chains and service providers are allowed to continue to operate from their workplace premises.

Entities which carry out activities which are not Essential Services and are not their related supply chains and service providers are not allowed to operate from their workplace premises. However, if they are able to continue to operate their businesses (in limited or full capacity) with their employees working from home, they should continue to do so. All other business, social or other activities that are not Essential Services and cannot be conducted through working from home shall be suspended.

Essential Services and Related Supply Chains

A list of Essential Services and their related supply chains is available on the [gobusiness COVID](#) website set up by the Ministry of Trade and Industry Singapore ("**MTI**"), please click [here](#) to view. The list includes food and beverage outlets, food suppliers, healthcare, social services, financial services, cleaning services, water, energy and environment related services, transport services, telecommunications services, construction, banking and finance, and other selected services required for daily living.

Entities carrying out activities listed as Essential Services or are related supply chains may continue to operate until informed otherwise. These entities are required to operate their business in compliance with the requirements set out in the Infectious Diseases (Workplace Measures to Prevent Spread of COVID-19) Regulations 2020 ("**Regulations**") which took effect on 2 April 2020, including but not limited to the following enhanced safe distancing measures:

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- **Telecommuting:** They must permit and provide the necessary facilities for their workers to work from their places of residence, and direct them to do so, unless it is not reasonably practicable to do so; and
- **Safe distancing:** They must implement safe distancing measures to reduce physical interactions.

For more details on the requirements set out in the Regulations, please refer to our earlier Update titled "[Laws Enforcing Telecommuting, Safe Distancing at Workplace Takes Effect 2 April 2020](#)".

Entities carrying out activities listed as Essential Services or are related supply chains must submit details of their plans to operate with the above enhanced safe distancing measures in place at [gobusiness COVID](#) by the end of **13 April 2020** via "Declaration for companies which provide essential services".

Entities Supporting Essential Services

If a business supports an Essential Service but its business activity is not covered under the list of Essential Services and related supply chains, it should submit a general "Application for exemption from suspension of business activities" via [gobusiness COVID](#) by providing the details on how it supports the Essential Service, including the names of the Essential Service firms and the goods and/or services that the business provides to these firms. MTI will respond within 48 hours if the business is allowed to continue operating during the Suspension period. The business may continue with the support of the Essential Service while waiting for MTI's response if enhanced safe distancing measures are in place at its workplace.

Other Non-essential Services Business

Businesses which do not provide Essential Services can continue to operate if they are able to do so from home via telecommuting. Further, owners of non-essential services businesses may go to their business locations to take care of crucial tasks that cannot be done remotely or to retrieve necessary materials or documents.

Otherwise, non-essential businesses are subject to the suspension of in-person and workplace activities. However, if such businesses have to maintain a small workforce at their place of business for safety and housekeeping purposes, they may apply submit a general "Application for exemption from suspension of business activities" via [gobusiness COVID](#) by providing the relevant information to substantiate their applications.

If such businesses would like to activate a small number of employees to work at the business premises and/or designated locations for short periods of time (i.e. less than a day), they may submit a "Request

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for time-limited exemption" via [gobusiness COVID](#). Such applications should be confined to temporary but critical needs within a business, for example, to perform selected functions that cannot be performed via telecommuting due to sensitivity (e.g. payroll processing). The total number of employees activated in a business should not exceed ten, or 25% of the total number of employees in the business, whichever is lower. The request should be submitted at least one day before the date which the business would like to activate staff to work at its business premise and/or designated location.

Enforcement by MOM Officers

From 7 April 2020, officers from the Ministry of Manpower ("**MOM**") will begin enforcement operations to ensure that only businesses which are exempted from the Suspension are operating from their workplace premises.

Employees of an employer that is providing Essential Services and their related supply chains may continue to work from the employer's workplace without any documentation if it is not reasonably practicable for the employees to perform their work from home. However, the employer is encouraged to provide a confirmation in writing to their employees that the functions to be performed by them are critical and must be performed on-site rather than via telecommuting.

Reference Materials

Please click on the links below for more information about the circuit breaker measures:

- Ministry of Health press release "[Circuit Breaker to Minimise Further Spread of COVID-19](#)" dated 3 April 2020
- MTI guidance "[Suspension of Activities at Workplace Premises to Reduce COVID-19 Transmission](#)" dated 3 April 2020
- MTI webpage [gobusiness COVID](#)
- MOM press release "[Additional Safe Distancing Measures for the Workplace](#)" dated 3 April 2020

Further Information

If you have any queries or wish to know what steps your business should take in response to the circuit breaker measures, please feel free to contact our team below who will be happy to assist.

For more articles and updates from our teams across the region on COVID-19 and related legal issues, please visit [Rajah & Tann Asia's COVID-19 Resource Centre](#).

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