

Tesla German plant halts production after sabotage claimed by far-left group

March 5 2024, by Sam Reeves



Tesla's German plant started operations in 2022.

Tesla halted production at its German factory Tuesday after power lines supplying the electric carmaker's only European plant were set on fire in an act of sabotage claimed by a far-left group.

Tesla owner Elon Musk tweeted in German that the attack was "extremely dumb", while the company said it would cost it several hundred million euros and it was unclear when production might resume.

Emergency services were called in the early hours of Tuesday to reports of a burning electricity pylon southeast of Berlin, close to the Tesla plant.

The blaze was extinguished but damage to the lines knocked out power to the US carmaker's factory, as well as surrounding villages.

After police said they had launched an investigation into suspected arson the act was claimed by far-left activists from the so-called Vulkangruppe (Volcano Group).

"With our sabotage, we have set ourselves the goal of achieving the biggest possible blackout of the Gigafactory," the group said in a statement posted on a far-left website.

The activists highlighted concerns about the environmental impact of the plant and the local water supply, at a time when Tesla is seeking to expand the site.

An outfit going by the same name claimed responsibility for an arson attack on the power supply of the Tesla plant in 2021, according to a report from domestic intelligence services the same year.

The latest attack was highly disruptive, with more than 12,000 workers at the site currently unable to do their jobs.

"We currently have no clear visibility when we can start production again," plant manager Andre Thierig told a press conference, adding that the damages will reach the "high, nine-figure area".

Musk said on X, formerly Twitter, that "these are either the dumbest eco-terrorists on Earth or they're puppets of those who don't have good environmental goals.

"Stopping production of electric vehicles, rather than fossil fuel vehicles, is 'extrem dumm'."

'Serious offense'

Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said that such an attack "is a serious criminal offense that cannot be justified by anything.

"If a left-wing extremist motive is confirmed, then this will be further proof that the left-wing extremist scene does not shy away from attacks on critical energy infrastructure."

The power outage is the latest problem to hit the factory.

In January, most production was halted at the site for two weeks due to a shortage of parts following shipping delays caused by Yemeni rebel attacks in the Red Sea, a vital trade route.

Tesla's German plant started production in 2022 following an arduous two-year approval and construction process dogged by administrative and legal obstacles.

Tesla wants to expand the site by 170 hectares (420 acres) and boost production up to one million vehicles annually to feed Europe's growing demand for electric cars and take on rivals who are shifting away from combustion engine vehicles.

But the plans have annoyed local residents, who voted against the project in a non-binding ballot last month.

After the vote, Tesla said it might have to rethink the plans.

"We recognize that the citizens of Gruenheide have concerns in connection with the planned expansion of the site," the company said.

Forest camp

Environmental activists opposed to the expansion of the factory run by Elon Musk's company recently set up a camp in a wooded area near the plant.

Protestors at the forest camp, situated in an area of forest that the carmaker will have to raze if the expansion goes ahead, share many of the locals' objections to the factory.

As well as deforestation, the activists say there is a threat to local drinking water supplies.

Stop Tesla, the group behind the protest camp, said Tuesday it had "no information" about the cause of the fire and shared its "solidarity with the workers at Tesla and the local residents".

Tesla has plenty of headaches elsewhere.

In Sweden, a strike by Tesla maintenance and repair workers has lasted more than four months over its refusal to sign a collective wage agreement.

In January, the company reported lower fourth-quarter operating profits despite higher revenues, while warning of slower volume growth this year.

Citation: Tesla German plant halts production after sabotage claimed by far-left group (2024, March 5) retrieved 8 May 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2024-03-tesla-german-halts-production-left.html>

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