Toyota: Production Will Be At 90 Percent In June

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TOKYO (AP) — Toyota production in Japan will recover to 90 percent of pre-disaster levels in June, faster than the world's biggest automaker had projected and highlighting its power to bounce back from the supply disruptions caused by the March earthquake and tsunami.

The disasters in northeastern Japan had damaged the plants of key parts suppliers, disrupting production at all Japanese automakers. Even with production increasing, some vehicle models could be in short supply for months.

Toyota Motor Corp. gave its good news to suppliers in a meeting Tuesday, company spokesman Keisuke Kirimoto said. It previously said global production would be at about 70 percent in coming months and was not expected to return to normal until late this year.

By the end of May, the crisis had cost the company production of 550,000 vehicles in Japan, and another 350,000 overseas. Production had been back recently at about 50 percent.

Toyota was initially missing 150 kinds of parts because of the supplier problems, and that was reduced to 30 parts earlier this month.

Other automakers are also suffering. Nissan Motor Co. expects worldwide production to be back at pre-disaster levels by October, and Honda has said normal production levels weren't expected until late this year.

Auto production in Japan plunged 60.1 percent in April from the previous year, according to Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association data released Tuesday. The 292,001 vehicles was a dramatic drop from 731,829 vehicles the same month a year earlier and marked the seventh straight month of on-year declines.

Toyota already said it will return to a faster-than-expected 70 percent of normal production in June in North America. It had cut North American production to about 30 percent of normal in May by idling factories for days or reducing workers' hours.

Some buyers of the new spacious "Prius a," or "Prius alpha," a revamp of the hit gasoline-electric hybrid, will have to wait until next year for deliveries.

That's because a key part, the lithium-ion battery, whose production was expected to be limited even before the disaster, will be even harder to keep making because of shortages, according to Toyota.

Japanese automakers are also facing another possible production problem in Japan — power shortages.

The Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant was heavily damaged by the disasters and is being decommissioned. A second nuclear power plant, Hamaoka in central Japan, is being shut down while its tsunami defenses are strengthened. Many of Toyota's plants are in the region Hamaoka powers.

It is still unclear how serious the power shortage might be for Toyota because electricity will be transferred from other areas.

Japanese automakers are planning to make Thursday and Friday off-days and have employees work over the weekend, when power demands are lower, to avoid a power crunch and blackout rollouts during the peak use months of July, August and September.

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