

Tips to survive the national shutdown

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The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) has announced a national shutdown on 20 March 2023. According to the EFF, the purpose of the shutdown is to highlight South Africa's socio-economic issues, including load shedding. The intention is to bring economic activity and movement to a halt by blocking road networks and disrupting the flow of services and goods.



Image source: Monstera from [Pexels](#)

The EFF will not be alone in this protest. Organised labour, including the South African Federation of Trade Unions (Safu) confirmed that it will join the national shutdown. This is significant because Safu has 24 trade union affiliates which span several sectors including facilities management, transport, the public sector, manufacturing, mining, and construction.

The right to initiate protest action is a constitutional right that is enshrined in section 17 of the Constitution and is regulated by the Regulation of Gatherings Act 205 of 1993. Furthermore, section 77 of the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 permits trade unions to embark on protest action to promote or defend the socio-economic interest of workers. Safu has complied with some of the procedural requirements of protest action, such as issuing a notice to the National Economic Development and Labour Council.

It has been reported that the EFF is in talks with some sectors, including the taxi industry, to join the national shutdown. A large portion of the workforce relies on public transport to commute to and from work. If the taxi industry, in addition to Safu affiliates and other political formations that have expressed their support, join the national shutdown, employers nationally will be impacted to some extent on Monday, 20 March 2023.

It is not a coincidence that Monday, 20 March is the day before Human Rights Day, which is a public holiday that also commemorates the Sharpeville massacre that took place in 1960 when apartheid police fired on a peaceful protest. Employers will accordingly have only three working days that week if the national shutdown occurs.

Considering the operational requirements of many businesses, employers may consider any of the following in preparing for the impact of the national shutdown:

- conducting a risk assessment to assess their exposure to potential risks;
- considering approving leave for 20 March 2023 as there may be many employees who will not be able to come to work;
- implementing flexible working arrangements for 20 March 2023, where possible; and
- concluding agreements to work overtime for the week of 20 to 24 March 2023, where relevant.

Ultimately, what is important is for employers to seriously consider the safety of their employees and their assets.

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