



COVID-19 Briefing Note: Procurement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Context

- The procurement of PPE has become a key issue during the Covid-19 crisis, as demand has risen around the world with a particular focus on healthcare workers
- We are now moving to the next phase of the crisis, with businesses beginning to reopen and movement restrictions starting to be eased
- Consequently many businesses are looking to procure PPE for their staff or their customers – whether in response to legal duties or out of concern for the safety of everyone in their workplaces
- For many of these businesses, this may be the first time they are having to procure PPE – they may be unfamiliar with the technical requirements, certification practices, supply chain structures and responsible sourcing methods
- At the same time, businesses procuring PPE need to do so urgently and in a context in which PPE supply chains are under considerable stress due to a combination of elevated demand and (in some contexts) reduced production due to local movement restrictions
- The obligation of all businesses to source responsibly is no different in the case of PPE – but how to go about that task may involve different approaches and resources

Technical guidelines

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Classification		
<i>Classification</i>	<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Example</i>
Category 1 PPE	Minimal risk	Disposable Glove (no mechanical or chemical protection)
Category 2 PPE	Moderate risk	Safety Footwear
Category 3 PPE	Risk of life-changing injury or illness	Full respiratory mask Chemical resistant gloves

- Category 2 PPE covers the majority of workplace risks
- A full respiratory mask (EN149) which protects the wearer is generally not necessary or appropriate outside of a healthcare setting in regards to Covid-19
- Non-sterile medical gloves are medical devices (Class IIa) but can also be chemical-resistant category 3 PPE

Medical/surgical devices – including masks	
<i>Classification</i>	<i>Degree of protection</i>
I	95% filtration rate
II	98% filtration rate
IIR	Tested for use in healthcare settings – not appropriate elsewhere
Other (e.g. cotton/textile, home-made)	Typically 50-60% filtration rate

- Most businesses will want to procure Type I or Type II medical/surgical masks for use by employees or customers
- All such masks are designed to protect other people – not the person wearing the mask
- Some textile masks do have the ability to kill viruses on contact - but if they are made out of a knitted material a virus may be able to pass through the knit unharmed
- Standards are quickly developing in many countries to regulate the use of certain types of fabric in the construction of new masks
- A full protective suit is unlikely to be necessary outside a healthcare setting

Key risks

- Quickly on-boarding new suppliers in an unfamiliar sector may make due diligence difficult and lead to unforeseen labour risks entering a company's supply chain
- Procuring PPE that is appropriate to a healthcare setting and unnecessary in other settings may unduly stress healthcare supply chains and make it harder for healthcare workers to obtain the PPE they need
- There is currently a significant quantity of fraudulent PPE available on the market which may pose a health risk to a company's own workers if procured and used inappropriately
- Suppliers who are facing significantly increased demand may be asking workers to work extended hours at short notice
- In production sites where social distancing is challenging, workers may be forced to work in hazardous conditions
- Workers themselves may lack adequate PPE to protect themselves in the workplace
- Workers may also face exposure to Covid-19 risks while travelling to and from, entering or exiting their workplace
- Other occupational safety and health risks are detailed in a separate [ETI Briefing Note](#)

Advice

- Use the European Safety Federation's resources & advice:
 - [Covid-19 resource bank](#)
 - [NANDO](#), which lists notified bodies in each EU country and what they are empowered to certify
 - Information on [suspicious PPE certificates](#)
 - [Guidance on importing PPE from China](#) including a link to a white list of companies
- Work through existing suppliers with whom you have long-term established relationships wherever possible
- If relevant, make use of supplier relationships held by sister companies in your corporate umbrella where those companies usually procure PPE or similar goods
- If using new suppliers, ensure you have visibility of the factories they are sourcing from and obtain any available health and safety risk assessments from those factories

Role of other stakeholders

- Make use of the expertise of established PPE businesses who may be able to provide advice on best practice in sourcing
- Seek advice from industry associations in sourcing countries to understand local risks
- Reach out to NGOs and trade unions in sourcing countries to obtain further information on local risks and work with them to monitor ongoing sourcing situations