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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Degree of protection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>95% filtration rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>98% filtration rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIR</td>
<td>Tested for use in healthcare settings – not appropriate elsewhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (e.g. cotton/textile, home-made)</td>
<td>Typically 50-60% filtration rate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 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