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Personal protective equipment: SBS calls on EU institutions and Member States to act rapidly during the coronavirus crisis and beyond

Brussels, 3 April 2020 - As the coronavirus hits Europe hard and the public demand for face masks increases exponentially, SBS has published a position paper asking for measures to strengthen Europe's manufacturing capacity for personal protective equipment (PPE) to effectively respond to the current coronavirus and any future crises. This is in line with the principles of the recently released EU industrial strategy.

The personal protective equipment sector is an industry driven by SMEs, in which local and regional players supply safety equipment according to European legislation and harmonised standards, including both disposable FFP2/3 masks and reusable masks with P2/3 filters.

During this crisis, the demand for disposable masks and other protective equipment has surged to 1000 times the usual level. No company in Europe or elsewhere can satisfy this exceptional demand. All personal protective equipment manufacturers are running at maximum production capacity, but the demand is only growing.

Today, SBS published a position paper asking for European direct investments to expand the production lines of safety equipment manufacturers, in order to increase their capacity not only for this crisis but also for any future crises. Many SME producers are ready and willing to step up to the task. Europe should consider safety equipment manufacturers a strategic asset in its fight against COVID-19.

SBS' second recommendation is related to the speed at which safety equipment is placed on the EU market. Considering the current crisis, the EU published a recommendation on conformity assessment and market surveillance of PPE. This Recommendation ensures faster placement of masks and other safety equipment on the market, including the temporary placement on the market of personal protective equipment not bearing CE marking. While it is necessary to place the relevant PPE on the market quickly under the current crisis, SBS stresses that market surveillance authorities have an important responsibility to ensure that equipment meets the essential safety and health requirements to protect health workers and citizens.

Finally, SBS welcomes the recent publication by the European Commission of a series of harmonised standards on medical devices and guidelines on conformity assessment procedures for protective equipment. CEN and CENELEC's recent decision to provide free access to standards defining the safety and quality requirements that apply to medical devices and personal protective equipment for protection against COVID-19 is also welcome. These initiatives will support SMEs converting their manufacturing installations to meet the growing demand for these products while satisfying the essential health and safety requirements of the EU legislation. This action should also support public authorities in their product procurement processes.

Useful links:

- SBS position paper: https://www.sbs-smc.eu/sites/default/files/publications/SBS%20Position%20Paper_SBS%20collaboration%20on%20PPE%20in%20times%20of%20the%20COVID-19%20crisis%20and%20beyond_03.04.2020.pdf
- List of harmonised standards for medical devices: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ.L.2020.0901.TOC>
- Standards available to download for free from the websites of CEN's national members: <https://standards.cen.eu/Win/Win/Do=CENWEB.5>
- Commission Recommendation on conformity assessment and market surveillance procedures within the context of the COVID-19 threat: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020H0403&from=EN>
- Commission guidance on conformity assessment of personal protective equipment (PPE), leave-on hand cleaners and hand disinfectants and 3D printing in the context of the coronavirus outbreak: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_550

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EDITORS' NOTES: Small Business Standards (SBS) is the association representing European SMEs in standardisation. SBS is co-financed by the European Commission and EFTA. Its 21 members are national and European sectoral and inter-professional associations representing SMEs in 32 European countries.

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