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Textile, plastics manufacturers join hands to produce, donate PPE

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CORONAVIRUS | Textile and plastics manufacturers are joining hands to make personal protective equipment (PPE) and donating them to frontliners dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic.

This voluntary production of PPE was coordinated by the Malaysian Plastics Manufacturers Association (MPMA) and the Federation of Malaysian Fashion, Textiles and Apparels Association (FMFTA).

Their members, manufacturers of diapers, food and beverage packagings, apparels and leather goods, are now mainly focused on helping the government to overcome the shortage of PPE as part of their duties as corporate citizens.

Both organisations have produced more than 5,000 pieces of jumpsuits, 100,000 disposable head covers, 105,000 medical waste bags, 5,000 face shields. Another 80,000 face shields are on the way.

This is according to MPMA president Lim Kok Boon who said the industries forked out around RM 1 million just to make the PPE in the past few weeks.

He said around 10 MPMA members who were producing food packaging and other plastic products voluntarily repurposed and reconfigured their equipment to produce PPE.

"They dropped their business to focus on PPE production. They lost money but this is not about money, this is about helping the country," he told Malaysiakini when contacted.

FMFTA pro-term committee chairperson Tan Thian Poh said around 10 textile, apparels factories and a cobbler shop are sewing PPE voluntarily, and they were allowed by the International Trade and Industry Ministry (Miti) to operate specifically for the production of PPE in the past few weeks.



"Our members in KL, Selangor, Penang and Melaka were taking part in sewing the PPE sets," he said.

He also confirmed that FMFTA was in talks with the Health Ministry to secure an agreement to manufacture PPE.

"We haven't received any orders yet. But once we receive it, we can start work as soon as possible. We already secured the (raw) materials," he said.

Before the coronavirus pandemic, Tan said 90 percent PPE were imported while 10 percent produced locally.

Lim said Malaysia needs to be self-sufficient in PPE production in the medium term as well as being able to produce sufficient PPE for domestic consumption if the country is hit by another outbreak.

"The long term (solution) is for the government to look into the domestic supply of PPE to ensure a certain level of self-sufficiency to prevent a critical shortage (of PPE)," he said.

Lim believed the textile and plastics industries can help the government to overcome the PPE shortage issue.

He, however, urged the government to allow the industries to increase their manpower to 70 percent, instead of merely 50 percent, of their total workforce as per conditioned by Miti.

This would allow the manufacturers, which are focused on producing PPE, to have more resources to produce plastic packaging for essential goods.

The surge of the coronavirus has led to a severe global shortage of PPE for frontliners and the prices of PPE and production raw materials have shot up.



Meanwhile, the government has admitted to a shortage of PPE following video and images of medical personnel [using garbage bags](#) as makeshift head covers circulated in social media last month.

The situation improved as Malaysia received millions of PPE sets donated by other countries and local NGOs, hospital staff, prisoners and activists forked out their own money and made an effort to sew the PPE sets.

Earlier this week, Health Ministry director-general Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah said the PPE stock could only cater the need for two weeks as the frontliners used up to 59 million pieces of PPEs a month.

He said the ministry was in talks with a few agencies especially those in the fashion industry, to ensure a continuous supply of PPE.

In Selangor, former Health Minister Dzulkefli Ahmad said he would discuss with Menteri Besar Amirudin Shari on repurposing industries involved in manufacturing to produce PPE.

"That would be the way forward. The companies can also earn an income," he added.

There are more than 2.16 million global Covid-19 cases with a death toll of close to 145,600 as of April 17. Malaysia recorded 9,717 cases with 86 deaths as of noon yesterday.

Keep up with the latest information on the outbreak in the country with *Malaysiakini's* free [Covid-19 tracker](#).

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