

HSE assembles specialist unit to support UK's coronavirus response

Britain's workplace regulator has assembled a team of specialists to assist the Government's national effort to get personal protective equipment (PPE) to frontline health care workers fighting the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Supporting the Government's PPE Plan, the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) PPE Unit is made up of regulatory inspectors, policy makers and scientists. It has been evaluating materials and specifications against relevant PPE requirements, to rapidly provide agreement that new and novel sources of supply have been properly assessed and can be deployed to frontline workers without unnecessary delay.

Working closely with the Department for Health and Social Care, as well as Public Health England, the NHS and other government departments, HSE's expertise in managing workplace risk combined with its knowledge of PPE material science and regulations is helping the Government's aims to ensure there is a continued supply to where PPE is needed.

The unprecedented global demand for PPE during the coronavirus pandemic has meant that the UK is sourcing products from new suppliers and HSE is providing the reassurance that these are of the right quality to protect NHS workers.

Rick Brunt, Head of Operational Strategy, explains: "For PPE to be effective and provide protection to the worker, it's not just a question of supply. It must also be suitable for the task in hand and we need to be assured that protective equipment will actually protect people.

"At this time of unprecedented national emergency, we're working very hard with other agencies to ensure those maximising supply of PPE have our support and assurance when they need it. Our advice is grounded in science and experience, not just our understanding of the regulations.

"We want to ensure that any PPE destined for our frontline workers, regardless of its provenance, is appropriately tested so that we know it will serve its purpose."

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. We prevent work-related death, injury and ill health through regulatory actions that range from influencing behaviours across whole industry sectors through to targeted interventions on individual businesses. These activities are supported by globally recognised scientific expertise. www.hse.gov.uk

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