CIRFS
EUROPEAN MAN-MADE FIBRES ASSOCIATION

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"MAN MADE FIBRES CRITICAL IN THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19"

Man Made Fibres have a critical role to play in the battle against both the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the Covid-19 lung disease. CIRFS, the European Man-made Fibres (MMF) Association has today issued a position paper calling on the European authorities to recognize the MMF industry as a supplier of critical goods.

Frédéric van Houte, Director General of CIRFS says: *"The world is being confronted with an unprecedented crisis. CIRFS is shocked by the dramatic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Our industry has taken all safety measures needed in this crisis. The main priority should now be a wide access to all necessary protective equipment. MMF are indispensable in the production of masks and other protective equipment. CIRFS therefore calls on the European Commission to recognize the MMF sector is an essential supplier in the production of health and hygiene-related products to fight Covid-19 and to deploy all possible measures possible to support it. The European MMF industry is committed to continuing to invest and to create jobs in Europe."*

The full text of the position paper is reproduced below:

- CIRFS, the European Man-made Fibres (MMF) Association, and its members are deeply saddened by the effects the Covid-19 pandemic and the huge number of lives lost in Europe and worldwide. We express our gratitude to health workers treating people affected as well as all workers and officials who help and make the impossible to keep the supply and flow of essential goods and services.

- Public health is an absolute priority. Our companies have taken all measures necessary to protect the safety of their people, their suppliers and their clients. MMF are indispensable to fight the pandemic. They enter into the production of face masks to prevent contamination from Covid-19 and are used in a wide range of other protective equipment such as gowns. Without MMF no wipes needed for disinfection nor many medical applications to help people affected and save lives. Man-made fibres are used in tents, filters but they are also needed in a wide number of other essential applications (e.g. for the transport of the above goods).

- Our companies are at the start of the textile value chain for a wide range of crucial products to fight this crisis. They do their utmost:
    1. To keep production levels as high as possible;
    2. To boost their current production capabilities to further satisfy and facilitate the increased demand in personal protective equipment[1];
    3. To deliver their goods in a safe and timely manner.

- CIRFS is concerned about the economic impact this crisis is having on the MMF sector. Covid-19 is creating barriers for people and goods -just to name a few-: reduction of sales levels due to closure

[1] In order to boost the European production of protective face masks and possibly other protective equipment in a short timeframe, a working group has been set up within Euratex, the European Apparel and Textile Organization, in which CIRFS is involved.

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of retail outlets and consequent closure of supplying factories; cancellation of orders or reduced number or no new orders for future months; logistic problems in the form of e.g. reported delays for trucks on some border crossings due to sanitary checks; serious pressure on cash flow due to reduced revenues, having an effect on the financial situation of every MMF company.

- CIRFS therefore calls upon European authorities to:
    1. Recognize the MMF sector as an essential supplier in the production of health and hygiene-related products to fight Covid-19. Companies must be permitted to continue to produce;
    2. Ensure that borders remain open and that there are no unjustified controls on the transport of goods or that borders are even closed (either internal or external);
    3. Secure supply routes for raw materials, inside and outside the EU;
    4. Allow to delay payment obligations (taxes, social security, etc.);
    5. Provide soft loans/credits and relax subsidy rules to allow full bank guarantees from governments and any abuse (high interest rates and additional securities or personal guarantees), preventing loans from being taken up;
    6. Prevent short-term cancellation of credit facilities due to new risk assessment, or abusive lending terms;
    7. Increase labour market flexibility (payroll compensation for temporary shut-downs);
    8. Allow MMF to benefit from a series of measures levelling the playing field such as indirect electricity price compensation under the draft revised EU ETS state aid guidelines;
    9. Remain vigilant against the dumping of MMF from outside Europe and specifically China, to ensure the survival of a strong and healthy MMF industry in Europe, which will be in a position to supply other critical industries in Europe in the future. There is evidence that the Chinese authorities are offering support for exports as their industry ramps up following the Covid-19 crisis.
    10. Design a specific support programme for the MMF industry – a dialogue between the Commission and CIRFS has already started;
    11. Implement all necessary monetary, fiscal and further specific steps in order to be able to grasp all opportunities that will appear after the covid-19 period ends.

CIRFS herewith reiterates the commitment of the European MMF industry to continue to produce and to further invest in Europe, maintaining and even increasing the jobs it currently provides. It will bring every support to the work of the European Commission and national authorities in the development of a strong European industrial policy.

About CIRFS:

CIRFS is the association for Europe's € 10.5 billion man-made fibres industry, representing the industry to the European authorities and providing the industry with a wide range of services. Its members cover about 80% of European man-made fibres output.

The European man-made fibres industry, with a total production in 2018 of ca. 4.6 million tonnes, is the world's second largest in terms of output and one of the global leaders in terms of innovation and quality.
Man-made fibres are used in every aspect of daily life: not only in apparel and furnishings, but also in automotive applications (interiors, insulation, seatbelts, airbags, tyres,…), industrial uses (conveyor belts, ropes, bulk containers, hoses, cable reinforcement, etc.), construction (e.g. geotextiles, cement reinforcement, insulation, weather protection), agriculture (agro textiles) and much else. They can be precisely engineered with characteristics such as flame retardancy, bioactivity, strength, warmth, waterproofing, moisture management, conductivity, and many more as needs arise.