

Media statement: for immediate release

PLASTICS SA URGES GOVERNMENT TO CLASSIFY PLASTICS MANUFACTURING SECTOR AS ESSENTIAL WORKERS AHEAD OF NATIONAL LOCKDOWN

Johannesburg, 25 March 2020. Plastics SA, the umbrella body representing all sectors of the South African plastics industry (including polymer producers and importers, converters, machine suppliers, fabricators and recyclers), is urging the Government to classify certain of its sectors as essential workers. This comes in the wake of President Cyril Ramaphosa's announcement made on Monday night that the nation will be locked down from midnight on Thursday until April 16 as part of efforts to protect millions of citizens from the life-threatening Covid-19 virus.

According to Anton Hanekom, Executive Director of Plastics SA, the plastics industry is vital in keeping the country running, ensuring that food and other essentials are available on supermarket shelves and that the healthcare system is supplied with all the materials and equipment they need to fight the disease.

"Now, more than ever before, plastics are essential to protect South Africans against viruses and germs, extend the shelf-life of products and provide critical infrastructure. If manufacturing in these industries are forced to shut down for the next three weeks, the plastics sector will not be able to meet the demand," Hanekom warns.

Since the first case of the Corona virus was reported in the country a few weeks ago, the plastics manufacturing industry has seen a dramatic increase in demand for products across the sector.

"Panic buying by consumers who are stocking up on groceries, cleaning materials, hand sanitisers etc. has forced packaging manufacturers to work at full capacity in order to keep up with the demand, whilst the medical industry has also seen a sharp increase in orders placed for IV bags, tubes, oxygen masks, gloves and protective gear and packaging for medicine," Hanekom says. He predicts that this growing demand for plastics products will continue to escalate over the next three weeks as people are no longer allowed to visit restaurants and will be forced to prepare their food at home.

"It is crucial to have workers in these manufacturing facilities during the lockdown period in order to maintain an uninterrupted supply of products. Whilst the plastics industry provides employment to an estimated 60 000 people, only some of them have jobs that allow them to work from home. Manufacturers of basic and essential plastic packaging, hygiene and health products need a steady supply of raw materials, making it also necessary for the polymer suppliers of those specific polymers to be on duty to ensure the material reaches those in the supply chain," he expands. He stresses that Plastics SA will be working closely with these suppliers and manufacturers to ensure they produce these products in a hygienic environment and that their workers are also protected.

Plastic packaging is needed for products such as handwash, bleach, medicines, food and beverages. Thanks to plastics, these products are safely and hygienically transported to retailers with minimal losses. Moreover, because plastics are lighter than alternative packaging materials, it saves CO² emissions during the transportation process. Most of the plastic used in packaging and healthcare applications are made from high quality plastics and are therefore highly recyclable.

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Plastics SA is currently also engaging with member companies regarding the products they are capable of producing to assist in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, such as ventilators, face masks, various equipment for healthcare workers, containers and bottles for hand sanitisers and soaps, infection control bags, clinical waste bins, anti-infection soluble laundry bags, and polythene sheeting.

“Where previously many of the plastic products that now in high demand were imported from overseas, it is encouraging to see that local manufacturing is boosted and that the revenue does not leave our country. We are urging suppliers, retailers and consumers to continue to “buy local” and support local enterprise, and are appealing to Government to continue working closely with industry role-players to ensure that a sufficient supply of food and household products are available to the South African public throughout the lockdown period,” Hanekom concludes.

For more information, visit www.plasticsinfo.co.za

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