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Addressing the Critical Supply Needs for Personal Protection Equipment in the Food & Beverage Manufacturing Industry

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, food and beverage manufacturers have been implementing measures in response to public health advice to manage the spread of the virus and keep workers healthy. This includes, where possible, having administrative staff work from home. The operations of the plants themselves, however, requires that line workers and supervisors – an estimated 210,000 or 75% of employees – to remain onsite.

Use of PPE In the Food & Beverage Manufacturing Sector

In the normal course of business food and beverage manufacturers use protective equipment, such as N-95 masks (for particulates) and R-95 masks (for vapors), to protect workers from genuine health risks. This equipment is essential to protect worker health and these functions cannot continue without them. The food sector estimates that normal demand (unrelated to COVID-19) for N-95 face masks is a maximum of 950,000 a month. Calculations are estimates, based on a limited survey of companies across the various subsectors of food and beverage manufacturing and utilizing 2019 employment and establishment numbers. These face masks are

The use of face masks as a COVID-19 mitigation strategy is not yet wide-spread, however some companies are already making use of this strategy and broader usage could emerge rapidly as public health guidance shifts. Should masks be adopted as a COVID-19 measure, demand would increase significantly. Conservative estimates would place industry requirements at 1.05 million non-surgical or paper masks a week (based on 210,000 workers, 1 mask, 5 shifts a week). More generous, and possibly realistic, estimates would require double to triple that if workers are required to change masks as they leave and re-enter the work floor.

PPE Supply for Food & Beverage Manufacturers

The availability of face masks for the food and beverage manufacturing sector has been significantly impacted by COVID-19 as the need for PPE in the health care system has increased.

Food and beverage companies are now facing a shortage of N-95 masks. In response, plants have looked at alternatives – including replacing N-95 masks with half face respirators with cartridges, using R-95 masks to replace N-95 masks or using face shields with dust masks. Supplies of alternative masks are also under pressure and, in some cases, examples of price increasing have occurred.

PPE Supply Impacts on Industry & Solutions

There are different industry scenarios related to PPE supply for which federal and provincial governments should be preparing. These are based on the following assumptions:

- o Any PPE supply will continue to be prioritized to the health care system.
- o Any residual PPE supply will be prioritized to food and beverage manufacturing.
- o Over time a domestic supply of PPE will emerge.

These scenarios include no further access to PPE supply at one extreme, potentially impacting the ability of some plants to remain operational, to sufficient supply available to meet industry demands, at the opposite extreme. Possible remedies for purchasing and distribution of PPE include industry and/or government bulk buying.

Food and Beverage Canada – Aliments et boissons Canada, and the provincial food association partners, have communicated the seriousness of the situation and the possible solutions to government officials.