

Sappi donates essential items and products for Covid-19 relief

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In an effort to provide some relief during the Covid-19 coronavirus global pandemic, Sappi Southern Africa has made available several donations of scarce items, such as hand sanitiser, face masks, nutritional porridge and paper products, to reduce pressure on the National Government's resources as well as to support the most vulnerable during these extraordinary times.



Following countrywide shortages in the supply of hand sanitiser, Sappi's science and research centre based in Pretoria was able to refocus its efforts to produce the company's first prototype hand sanitiser. This led to a partnership with a Johannesburg-based company to produce 16,000 litres of Sappi hand sanitiser worth about R1 million. Having been successful in these efforts, Sappi is now able to distribute the sanitiser to more than 80 community clinics and health care centres in the rural and peri-urban areas of KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga. Sappi is also distributing sanitiser to its own employees and their families.

While there remains a shortage on the required PPE for health practitioners in the country, Sappi was able to procure 15,000 surgical masks for community clinics and health care centres in KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga – enabling community health practitioners to perform their duties safely. In addition, Sappi has procured 19,000 cloth masks, which were needed for their own employees as well as providing access to their contractors who continue to deliver essential services during this time of national lockdown and who require essential PPE.

Again, seeing the need to respond rapidly to a situation, Sappi's Saiccor Mill in Umkomaas was able to rent spare sewing machines from a local business, install them at its Skills Centre and deploy six apprentices, to make cloth masks. Following a short guideline from the internet, they are now producing 28 masks per hour, working towards the target of making a further 3,000 of these cloth masks. Post-lockdown, Sappi will be looking into providing training opportunities to local SMMEs in the area for the continued production of cloth masks.

The masks are distributed along with instructions on how they should be used for maximum effectiveness, with the clear message that they should be used in addition to observing the rules of social distancing and personal hygiene regimes. Sappi's procurement department is also busy sourcing gloves and hand soap which will be added to the list of items to be donated.

Understanding that the pandemic is placing great strain on the livelihoods of communities that are already severely pressurised, Sappi has also entered into a partnership with the Southern Lodestar Foundation and the Spar Group, for the distribution of much-needed nutritional porridge. Sappi is using its knowledge and access to rural community networks to distribute 60,000kg of A+ instant porridge to vulnerable communities in KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga, using the networks provided by community health workers. The Southern Lodestar Foundation is an organisation which provides innovative nutrition solutions for children and has developed the instant porridge which is being used in school breakfast programmes and is renowned for its nutritional value consisting of protein and other micronutrients.

To 'Live a Life of Note' is the Sappi Typek brand message and in a continuation of its drive to encourage people to remain positive and to bring about positive change, Typek challenged South Africans to do just that. Using its social media platform, people who shared their messages of hope and inspiration with others on how they were 'living a life of note' during the SA Lockdown can win a R1,000 a day, with Sappi pledging an additional R1,000 a day to the Solidarity Fund. In doing so, people who inspire others through these difficult times win something for themselves, whilst Typek, remaining true to its brand value, will contribute R35,000 to the fund.

"Sappi has also realised that this situation could in the long run have lingering effects on the resources of many institutions and organisations, and as such we have pledged a donation of Sappi manufactured toilet paper and Typek office paper to the value of R2 million to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) for their future distribution to deserving recipients," commented Alex Thiel, CEO of Sappi Southern Africa.

"In addition to these donations of first-need items and other initiatives, we have also used our considerable networks within local communities to distribute useful educational material regarding the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic. We commit to continue contributing to 'flatten the curve' while delivering essential services, as we are dedicated in heeding the call of the President in fighting this disease and its effects on our country," he said.

Sappi is also actively participating in several coordinated efforts that are being driven by government and private sector bodies; in this regard Sappi has contributed to relief efforts in the two provinces through the Department of Economic Development as well as Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA).

Through its contribution of time and expertise, members of Sappi's communication department are also playing an active role in formalising a targeted communication programme for the water and sanitation economic development stream through the organised business support initiative led by BSA (Business for South Africa).

"Sappi will be able to supplement the funding for some of these initiatives, thanks to the fact that its board of directors and regional leadership teams have volunteered a 10 percent reduction in salaries or fees for the three months ending June 2020, as well forfeiting short-term incentive bonuses for 2020. We believe that the kind of guidance that we are experiencing from our country's leader President Ramaphosa at this time, exemplifies the visible leadership which will help companies pull through this crisis together, and as an essential services provider, we will continue to do all we can to keep our country healthy and safe," said Alex Thiel.

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