



ACG's new PPE plant – from idea to reality in less than a month

Members of Sweden's ACG Group have rapidly responded to their country's urgent need for PPE (protective personal equipment), by setting up and staffing a dedicated new nonwovens fabric converting and single-use garment making-up plant in just three weeks.

The new plant was established to convert and coat the fabric and turn it into fully finished protective overalls for hospital staff each month. It now employs 80 staff in a two-shift operation and has been such a success that a second immediate order has been secured from the Swedish authorities. This will push production up to a monthly 1.8 million square metres of converted fabric turned into 692,000 finished medical garments.

Spread of Covid-19

By the middle of March, as Covid-19 began to spread outside China, the immediate future was looking decidedly bleak for ACG Group, which has seven subsidiaries in total. Many activities were immediately cancelled with the imposition of an international travel ban and orders were also beginning to fall away on the domestic market.

"We were shocked by how fast things were moving and realised it would hit us hard if we didn't react," says Christian Moore, CEO of ACG Kinna, which spearheaded the new PPE initiative with sister company ACG Nyström – both members of TMAS, the Swedish textile machinery association.

Options

At an emergency group meeting to explore all options, the pressing demand for PPE by hospitals and frontline workers fighting Covid-19 became immediately apparent and an action plan was put in place within hours. Consultations with local hospitals and the state authorities to assess their needs followed in the next few days, and the manufacturing space for the new operation was quickly allocated at the group's head office in Borås, along with a shopping list for the necessary equipment that couldn't be sourced from within the group itself.

"Our group has been around since 1921 and has built up a wealth of know-how, with automation expertise being critical to getting the line up and running so quickly," says Christian Moore. "We also have very extensive contacts which enabled us to get hold of the additional machines and materials we needed, which isn't easy at present."

The company has managed to obtain some 29 welding machines, with this bonding method being a prerequisite for achieving the necessary tight seams for the garments. It has also secured coating equipment and a guaranteed supply of the antibacterial finishing treatment the fabrics require. At present, all of the garments produced are being supplied to Sweden's municipal and regional health authorities, although there has been a huge demand from elsewhere. The group foresees its current production continuing for at least the next six months and may now opt to significantly increase it further to cater for the demand internationally.

Long-term approach

For the ACG Group, this multi-million euro initiative is being viewed as a long-term investment, with the current crisis revealing that the need for such production – and the automation skills necessary to enable it – is greater in countries like Sweden than was previously perhaps appreciated.

“This is a fantastic example of Sweden’s entrepreneurial spirit and innovation and also demonstrates the many problems that can be solved through automation,” says TMAS Secretary General Therese Premler-Andersson. “Obtaining all of the materials and machines needed for the initiative and getting the new plant up and running so quickly is an extraordinary achievement and many people within the ACG Group worked day and night to make it happen.”

“I am happy and proud there is such a ‘can do’ spirit within TMAS, and as a citizen I am also grateful that this service is being provided. It underlines the importance of expertise in textiles and automation in ensuring local production and hopefully, in the long term, something good can come out of this situation for our industry across Europe.”

Picture and caption:

AWOL253 - Christian Moore, CEO of ACG Kinna and Thomas Arvidsson, Vice President of ACG Nyström, spearheaded the new operation. Image courtesy of BoråsTidning.

AWOL254 - “Right now everyone should be making the same product at the same time, all around the world,” says Christian Moore, who had to work hard to gain access to the necessary nonwovens. Image courtesy of BoråsTidning.

AWOL255 - Manufacturing space for the new operation was quickly allocated at the group’s head office in Borås. Image courtesy of BoråsTidning.

AWOL256 - Jessica Eckerström usually works at ACG Group’s Eskil printing plant, which has reduced order intake. She is now working on the production of protective garments. “It’s great to be able to help, and fun too,” she says. Image courtesy of BoråsTidning.

FOOTNOTE TO EDITORS

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