19th March 2020

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing to you to call for the urgent introduction of measures to ensure the continued provision of essential household and pharmaceutical goods across the UK, as well as meeting key infrastructure demands. Unless changes are made - in particular the recognition of key parts of the plastics sector as critical infrastructure - manufacturing industry will not be able to meet demand.

Key products supplied by the sector include:

- Packaging - crucial for the safe and secure supply of food
- Medical equipment - such as blood bags and syringes
- Pipes systems - facilitating the distribution of fresh, clean water
- Communications and energy supply systems

The BPF is witnessing critical item shortages and government action is needed to address this. For example, there have been estimates of an overall uplift in retail sales last weekend of between 600% and 800%. This has massively increased demand for packaging in addition to other products.

Plastics packaging is a key example. It is used to ensure handwash, bleach, medicines and food and drink are hygienically and safely transported to retailers with minimal losses. It is impossible for the supply chain to deliver these items without packaging. The sector has been meeting a massive increase in demand for packaging for all the above items, with very high order increases for bleach, handwash, medicines and food and drink.

Having workers in these facilities is crucial in order to maintain an uninterrupted supply of products and services. Whilst the plastics packaging industry employs over 20,000 people, only 18% have a role that permits them to work from home (for the wider plastics industry, of which there are 183,000, it is less than 25%).

We have already approached member companies and enquired about the products they are capable of producing (some by changing their current production). This includes ventilators, facemasks, various equipment for healthcare workers, clinical refuse sacks, containers and bottles for hand sanitisers and soaps, infection control bags, clinical waste bins, anti-infection soluble laundry bags, and polythene sheeting. Many UK manufacturers have clean rooms ensuring products can be produced in a hygienic environment.

Packaging companies and other key processors are reliant on a steady supply of raw materials (this includes polymer producers as well as manufacturers of masterbatch and key additives) and the polymer distributors who ensure the material reaches those in the supply chain. The UK has a large (nearly 1000) concentration of...
moulders, who have flexibilities in their manufacturing, enabling them to produce mouldings for practically any sector.

Please also be aware that, after packaging, construction is the second largest user of plastics, where critical products include plastic pipe systems for both drinking water and drainage. It is also crucial that waste management companies and recyclers continue to operate, not only to deal with the waste but to provide the much needed recycled material (the raw materials manufacturers producing in the UK can only meet approximately 50% of current overall demand).

Clearly as the situation moves forward, maintaining food, water and medical supplies will be crucial, as well as the maintenance of communications and energy distribution systems.

We urge the government to evaluate the consequences of closing key sites and to recognise that plastic manufacturers are part of the critical infrastructure of the UK.

Yours sincerely,

Philip Law
Director General, British Plastics Federation