



Employee Safety

Made in the U.S.: Glove-Maker SHOWA's Push to Boost Domestic PPE Production

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With manufacturers and other industries looking for secure supply lines of PPE for their workers, here's how SHOWA is responding to the demand for U.S.-made products with its new state-of-the-art glove manufacturing facility in Fayette, Alabama.

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic just over 18 months ago, personal protective equipment (PPE) was hard to find.

Items such as single-use nitrile gloves, which provide a vital two-way barrier for medical professionals and front-line workers in industrial and commercial settings, were mostly produced overseas. While in high demand, procurement was hampered by supply chain issues in regions such as Asia.

This provided an opportunity for companies such as SHOWA to boost their domestic production and begin supplying customers who prefer to buy from U.S.-based sources.

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Gil LeVerne
SHOWA

SHOWA is a vertically integrated hand protection manufacturer that makes protective gloves for all industries and applications, offering chemical, anti-cut and anti-static protection.

SHOWA is currently the only U.S. manufacturer and distributor of single-use nitrile gloves, through its U.S. facility in Fayette, Alabama. The company invented the world's first single-use nitrile glove in the early 1990s during the HIV/AIDS epidemic in response to allergic reactions some users had with natural latex rubber gloves.

Boosting U.S. PPE Supplies

In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, SHOWA launched a massive multimillion-dollar expansion project at the company's Fayette plant that is now coming to fruition, and it will increase production capabilities of single-use nitrile gloves in the United States.

After the plant expansion was completed last October, the company started to build two high-speed production lines to further increase its PPE output. Those lines are now near completion, and lines three and four should be completed over the next year or so, says Gil LeVerne, SHOWA's director of marketing for the Americas and Oceania. SHOWA also has broken ground on two 40,000-square-foot facilities that each will house four high-speed production lines.

"We are making 600,000 pieces a day today," LeVerne says. "Things are happening quickly now, and we will continue to double our capacity probably every two years until we are ultimately making 3 billion gloves annually in 2024, when we have all 12 lines completed."

LeVerne also notes that SHOWA's Fayette plant is in the middle of a hiring surge amid rising demand for its gloves. According to one report, the plant had 270 employees at the end of January and was adding eight to 10 new workers per week, with the expectation to eventually grow to 400 employees.

Additionally, SHOWA is one of five companies providing gloves to the Department of Defense under \$400 million in contracts paid for from a second coronavirus relief package passed by Congress in December 2020, according to a report in *Stars and Stripes*, the newspaper for the U.S. military.

"Protecting the homeland, creating jobs and bringing domestic supply back to the U.S. so it can be trucked to just about anywhere within a day or two is a big deal," LeVerne says, adding that the plant expansion has received considerable support from federal, state and local governments.

Fully Biodegradable Nitrile Gloves

SHOWA's traditional nitrile gloves are made of a synthetic rubber compound that is nonallergenic and an alternative to traditional latex. The company has also developed a glove material already present in a range of its nitrile gloves that allows companies to boost their green credentials.

SHOWA's *Eco Best Technology* (EBT) has the same texture and appearance as regular nitrile gloves and can be used in the same applications, SHOWA says. The difference is the EBT additive, which allows discarded nitrile gloves to attract enough microbial activity to be broken down by microorganisms.

Regular nitrile material takes more than 100 years to biodegrade and break down in a landfill, says SHOWA, whereas the biodegradation rate of gloves made with EBT takes just one to five years, depending on landfill conditions.

When EBT gloves are disposed of in biologically active landfills, microorganisms are attracted to the EBT material, which allows them to consume, metabolize and break down the gloves into natural compounds.

EBT requires biologically active landfills for biodegradation. This means gloves with EBT can't begin to biodegrade before disposal. These abilities have been validated by independent certified laboratories using international test methods ASTM D5511 and D5526.

"Given the large number of gloves now being used every day in hospitals, schools, labs and

manufacturing facilities, it's important for SHOWA to be part of the solution and not a part of the problem," says Jason Beddigs, a national account manager at SHOWA.

"All the gloves we're going to be manufacturing in Fayette, whether it's industrial grade, food grade or medical grade, they are going to fit into our sustainability initiative," he says, "and that's good news for anybody who cares about climate change or global warming."

What is your shop doing to deal with a shortage of PPE? What challenges or success stories can you share? Let us know in the comments below.

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