

Building a Safer, Stronger Healthcare Supply Chain

BACKGROUND

TRSA represents the \$27 billion linen, uniform and facility services industry, which employs 130,000+ people at 2,500+ facilities in North America. TRSA members are commercial laundry/facility services companies and their supplier partners who manufacture and provide essential supplies and infrastructure. Both sectors of our membership enable life-sustaining businesses to safely operate. These include healthcare facilities, grocery stores, infrastructure maintenance, food processing, public utilities (water and energy), first responders, federal and state governments, laboratories, pharmaceutical manufacturers, and other fundamental supply chain businesses.

Essential workers and the public depend on our industry to produce and process PPE, including healthcare contact textiles (HCTs), flame-resistant and high-visibility clothing, first aid and safety items, and other protective garments. Many PPE products must be cleaned by laundries that use specialized processes to ensure their safety and integrity. TRSA members process 90% of the HCTs (i.e., isolation and barrier gowns, bed linens, scrubs, etc.) used by healthcare facilities across the United States. As evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, laundry processing interruptions threaten the safe operation of healthcare facilities as well as other critical infrastructure businesses.

TRSA POSITION

Currently, the U.S. healthcare market relies on disposable HCTs in more than 90% of cases, even where reusable HCTs would be an equivalent or superior substitute. This overreliance on disposable products has led to dangerous supply shortages, particularly during public health emergencies. In contrast, reusable HCTs processed by Hygienically Clean-certified laundries support a more secure, safe, and sustainable supply chain than foreign-sourced disposable products. During the pandemic, TRSA members helped to address HCT shortage by supplementing disposables with reusable HCTs that were equally or more protective, hygienically clean, and safe, demonstrating the resilience and scalability of reusable systems.

Following a bi-partisan congressional letter sent in 2023 to the Department of Health and Human Services, the CDC contracted with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) to “conduct a study of the potential benefits and feasibility of increasing the usage of HCT’s” in healthcare facilities. NASEM convened a two-day workshop that brought together technical experts, policymakers, manufacturers, healthcare providers, industrial laundry operators, and academics to examine the safety, environmental sustainability, and cost savings of reusable PPE and to propose opportunities to expand its adoption.

As a result of this effort, the CDC’s PPE operation concluded that “the realization of the potential benefits of reusable PPE - such as reduced waste, decreased overall costs, and lower environmental impact - is unlikely without legislation.” The need to “identify partners” who can help advance the legislative and regulatory changes was deemed necessary to “increase the use of reusable PPE.”

In a letter dated October 19, 2023, the CDC committed to releasing the final report describing the feasibility and potential benefits of the increased use of reusable HCTs. This report consolidates research conducted between August 2023 and May 2024 and was expected to be released in August 2024. While the report has been finalized, it has not yet been submitted to Congress or made publicly available.

ACTION

Contact Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy directing the National Personal Protective Technology Laboratory to submit to Congress the study developed after the NASEM Workshop to Congress as outlined in a letter dated October 19, 2023.