

Textile Recycling Groups Urge Kenyan Officials to Quickly Finalize Secondhand Clothing Importation Guidelines

ABINGDON, Md. (July 29, 2020)— The Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association (SMART) and the European Recycling Industries’ Confederation (EuRIC) are urging Kenyan trade and health officials to quickly finalize guidelines for the safe handling of secondhand clothing (Mitumba) imports so that economic benefits of the industry may be rapidly restored.

On April 1, 2020, industry representatives were notified by the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) that the country’s importation of used garments and shoes had been suspended until further notice. KEBS said it was implementing the ban as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). However, [as SMART and other stakeholders pointed out](#), numerous studies have shown that COVID-19 may be detectable on hard, non-porous surfaces like plastics and metals for hours and potentially up to 2 to 3 days, and it is even less likely to survive on soft, porous surfaces like textiles including rugs, carpets, shoes and clothing, new or used. Used clothing that is shipped overseas is typically in transit for weeks, if not months at a time – far longer than the virus has ever been shown to survive on even the most hospitable non-porous hard surfaces.

On July 6, 2020 [President Uhuru Kenyatta outlined his plans for the phased reopening of Kenya](#) from its COVID-19 lockdown. In his statement, he instructed Mitumba trade to resume following the development of guidelines by the ministries of trade and health. Within the last month, the local Mitumba Association provided draft protocols to the committee tasked with reviewing the safety protocols. The association is awaiting the Kenyan government’s final approval of the draft procedures.

“SMART welcomes President Kenyatta’s lifting of the ban on the importation of secondhand clothing. These imports provide countless Kenyans access to high quality, affordable clothing which, through buying, selling, repairing and/or altering imported secondhand clothing and shoes, generates tens of thousands of jobs in Kenya, allowing workers to support themselves and provide for their families,” said SMART’s Executive Director Jackie King. “There is absolutely no supporting evidence that COVID-19 can be transmitted through secondhand textiles,” she continued. “We are urging Kenyan officials to move quickly to finalize reasonable guidelines so that this vital industry can resume its critical activities.”

“EuRIC entirely understands that governments take measures to legitimately protect workers who deal with the further processing of secondhand textiles. However, based on robust scientific findings, it is very unlikely that those workers can spread or get infected by handling these textiles due to the low environmental stability of COVID-19 on the textile surface combined with the average shipping time

from Europe to Kenya” said EuRIC Textiles President Mariska Zandvliet and continued: “We very much welcome the lifting of the ban as well as the development of sound guidelines on how to do so.”

For more information on SMART, visit www.smartasn.org. Please direct media inquiries for SMART to Patrick Seidl at 410-420-2001 or by email at Patrick.Seidl@fallstongroup.com.

About SMART

Established in 1932, the [Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association \(SMART\)](#) is an international nonprofit trade association that strengthens the economic opportunities of its diverse membership by promoting the interdependence of the for-profit textile recycling industry segments and providing a common forum for networking, education and trade. SMART members use and convert recycled and secondary materials from used clothing, commercial laundries and non-woven, off spec material, new mills ends and paper from around the world. SMART member companies create thousands of jobs worldwide, proving each day you can make money by being socially responsible.

About EuRIC

EuRIC – [The European Recycling Industries’ Confederation](#) – is the umbrella organisation for recycling industries in Europe. Through its Member Federations from 20 EU and EFTA countries, EuRIC represents today across Europe over:

- 5,500 companies generating an aggregated annual turnover of about 95 billion €, including large companies and SMEs, involved in the recycling and trade of various resource streams;
- 300,000 local jobs which cannot be outsourced to third EU countries;
- An average of 150 million tons of waste recycled per year (paper, metals, glass and beyond);

By turning wastes into new resources, recyclers play a key role in a circular economy. For additional information, contact euric@euric-aisbl.eu.