



Politics

Australia seizes faulty coronavirus protective equipment imported from China

Exclusive by defence correspondent Andrew Greene

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Authorities have begun seizing Chinese-made faulty face masks and other protective clothing that is being exported to Australia to help halt the spread of coronavirus.

The ABC has learnt that in recent weeks, Australian Border Force (ABF) officers have intercepted several deliveries of personal protective equipment (PPE) that have been found to be counterfeit or otherwise faulty.

One law enforcement official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, estimated the ABF had already seized 800,000 masks with a combined value of more than \$1.2 million on the Australian market.

"We started seeing this stuff arriving roughly three weeks ago when news of the pandemic was really taking off," the official told the ABC.

"The dodgy material is coming via air cargo because there is a backlog of sea freight at Australian ports."

The official stressed that not all Chinese products were considered faulty, and other imports of PPE from China were still passing Australian regulations.

The ABC has approached the Department of Home Affairs and the Minister for Home Affairs for comment.

The Department refused to comment and the ABC is yet to receive a response from the Minister's office.

The Federal Government on Wednesday officially banned the exporting of protective equipment such as masks, gloves and gowns from Australia during the coronavirus outbreak.

It foreshadowed the plan last week, and Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton and Health Minister Greg Hunt have now signed off on the new regulations.

New rules are also stopping people buying up supplies of protective equipment to then resell locally at an inflated price.

It has also sought to boost supply by opening up the nation's emergency medical stockpile and increasing domestic production.

In Victoria, Army personnel have been deployed to manufacturer Med-Con to help double the factory's production of face masks.

Several European governments have rejected Chinese-made equipment designed to combat the coronavirus outbreak in recent days.

Thousands of testing kits and medical masks are below standard or defective, according to authorities in Spain, Turkey and the Netherlands.

The Dutch health ministry announced it had recalled 600,000 face masks on March 28.

The equipment arrived from a Chinese manufacturer on March 21 and had already been distributed to frontline medical teams.

Dutch officials said the masks did not fit and their filters did not work as intended, even though they had a quality certificate.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying has rejected suggestions the country's exports were faulty.

"A large number of Chinese manufacturers are working around the clock to help other countries save lives," she said on Tuesday.

Topics: government-and-politics, defence-and-national-security, infectious-diseases-other, federal-government, health, defence-forces, respiratory-diseases, covid-19, community-and-society, australia

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