

# Disposal issues prompt global glove industry to go green

Sector trying to reduce use of synthetic rubber component

V SAJEEV KUMAR

Kochi, July 24

The alarming increase in the usage of gloves triggered by Covid has prompted global glove industry to look at biodegradable products, as disposal of gloves is posing a major challenge worldwide.

After the Covid pandemic, 15,533 pieces of gloves are used every second and it will be the greatest challenge for the industry to dispose of, says S Supramaniam, president, Malaysian Rubber Glove Manufacturers Association. The industry is trying to reduce the synthetic rubber (SR) component in gloves and use more natural materials like natural rubber, making it more eco-friendly, he told *BusinessLine* on the sidelines of India Rubber Meet 2022.

He pointed out that 15 years ago the share of SR in glove production was five per cent and this has gone up to 60 per cent because of



S. Supramaniam, president, Malaysian Rubber Glove Manufacturers Association

short supply in NR and the reported protein allergy caused by gloves produced with NR. This had restrained buyers, especially from developed countries, from using gloves manufactured with NR.

He also stressed the need to change the mindset of buyers in developed countries on the protein allergy in gloves manufactured with natural rubber.

## Growth during Covid

“We are now looking at making gloves biodegradable by moving away from fossil fuel materials to natural fuel materials,” Supramaniam said.

The global glove industry has posted 80-90 per cent growth during the Covid pandemic and it was 10-12 per cent before the pandemic. The growth rate in the post pandemic period will be in the range between 12-15 per cent, thanks to increased awareness about hygiene and healthcare.

“Ageing population in many countries will help the usage of more gloves which will benefit the industry”, he said.

Malaysia accounts for 67 per cent of the world glove production of 492 billion pieces with a retail value of \$150 billion, followed by China (20-22 per cent), Thailand (10 per cent), Indonesia (3 per cent) and India (0.7 per cent).

India has ample scope for glove production due to the availability of natural rubber and its abundant workforce. However, China is mainly using synthetic rubber, but natural rubber has its inherent strength, he said.

The per capita consumption of gloves is 75 pairs in the US and 65 in Europe compared to 6 pairs in China and 3 pairs in India.