

**Montana Department of Corrections
Press Release**

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**Montana Department of Corrections manufactures personal protective equipment amid
COVID-19 crisis**

To help meet the ongoing need for personal protective equipment (PPE) throughout the state during the COVID-19 pandemic, inmate workers with the Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) are focusing efforts on producing these high-demand items.

“Manufacturing utility PPE at our facilities seemed like a logical solution,” said Montana Correctional Enterprises (MCE) Administrator Gayle Butler referring to the nation-wide shortage of PPE. “We have knowledgeable staff, talented inmate workers, and the overall ability to be versatile in our operations.”

Every day, MCE, a division of the DOC, provides more than 700 inmates from Montana State Prison in Deer Lodge and Montana Women’s Prison in Billings with general and vocational education and on-the-job training. Qualifying inmates apply for inmate positions within MCE where they learn and work at jobs including woodworking, sewing, welding, cook chill, graphic design, and more.

“As soon as we received the patterns for masks, gowns and other utility PPE, and got the proper fabric in stock, our inmate workers were able to shift gears from sewing prison clothing to sewing and assembling PPE,” Butler said. “Over the past couple of weeks, they have produced about 5,300 cloth masks, 1,400 face shields, 350 shoe covers, 350 head covers, 400 gowns, 300 mask covers, and more.”

In March, the DOC ordered a 3-D printer to allow inmate workers to craft face masks that use N95 filters. Production of those masks began last week, and 35 of those have been assembled to date. Hand sanitizer is also on the department’s production list.

Butler said she is grateful for assistance from her peers at correctional enterprises across the country as MCE negotiates this shift in activity. The group was able to collaborate to acquire patterns for PPE and brainstorm solutions to any questions that arose.

According to Butler, consumption of the PPE is internal to the DOC at this point. Cloth masks are being distributed to all employees and offenders at the DOC’s secure facilities as an added line of defense against COVID-19.

Butler notes the inmates who are working to prepare the PPE, like all DOC inmates, have been educated regarding the prevention of COVID-19, and practice social distancing while they are at work at MCE.

Once the DOC's PPE needs are fulfilled, the crews will begin production to fulfill requests outside the facilities. MCE, in accordance with state PPE ordering and distribution procedures, is receiving requests from health care centers, law enforcement, and more.

"Thanks to the vigilance of DOC employees, we have not had a confirmed case of COVID-19 in any of our secure facilities," said DOC Director Reginald D. Michael Friday. "We are hopeful that good fortune will continue and we're glad MCE has been able to ensure our staff and inmates have extra protection during this time. Beyond that, we are thrilled we'll be able to extend that assistance outside the walls of the facility."

For more information about Montana Correctional Enterprises, visit cor.mt.gov/Adult/MCE.