

Repurposing Unneeded Corporate Uniforms



Case study: Sustainable Procurement

The Story

We have seen unprecedented environmental improvements since the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic. However, experts note that this positive environmental change is not likely to be long-lasting and we cannot rely on the unintended environmental benefits brought about by the pandemic.

Alongside some of the improvements though we have also seen the birth of a new environmental hazard protector... the humble facemask. With it being a necessary safety requirement for all of our front line staff, AT knew that there was a negative impact brought about by the waste these facemasks left on the environment.

The Sustainable Procurement approach

We needed to procure a facemask that most importantly provided the highest levels of health and safety protection for our frontline staff but that also would not have a negative impact on the planet.

Harry Glynn (AT Procurement) and Kate Hamill (Customer Experience Design), began investigating how we might be able to solve this challenge.

One stroke of luck came up when they found that our existing uniform supplier, De Vere Apparel, was housing several old AT uniforms that were no longer required. These uniforms were causing storage problems for the De Vere, who had been trying to solve this challenge for a long time. They shared a similar environmental ethos to AT and sending

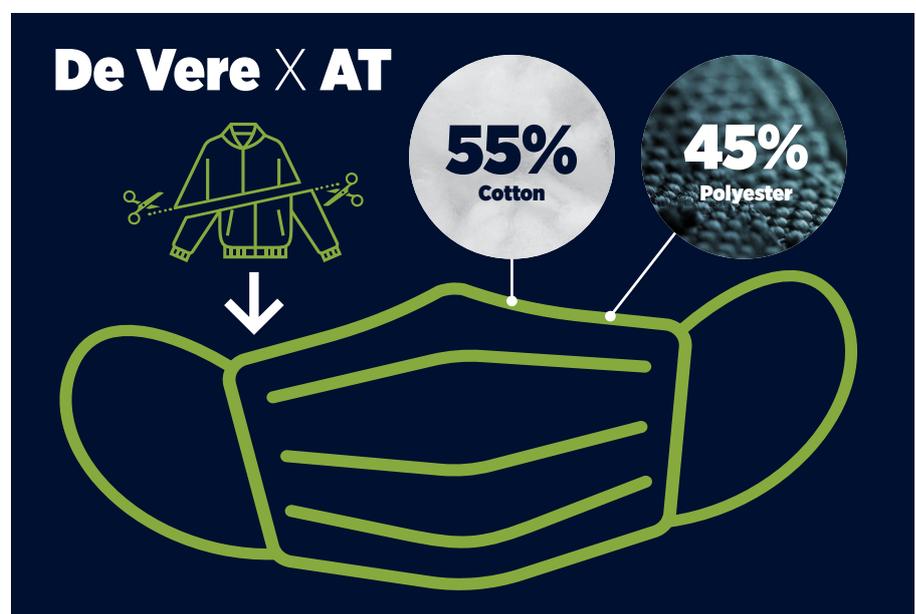
the unneeded uniforms to landfill was not an option!

Together De Vere and AT came up with a concept for the new masks made out of the unneeded uniforms and ran a trial with 20 AT staff. Volunteers came from a range of teams including Parking Services & Compliance, Transport Compliance, Facilities Operations and Customer Services.

The uniform used is a discontinued shirt style that has the same blue stripe as the current Metro shirt, so from a uniform and brand point of view, it made sense. The fabric is soft poly-cotton (55% cotton 45% polyester) which is comfortable on the skin, breathable and extremely durable. It can survive any harsh wash that a reusable mask might need.

The hardest part was sourcing the filter. The original filter did not have a great shelf life, so alternative options were explored. De Vere suggested a 5-layer filter made of non-woven fabric, meltdown cloth and an activated carbon layer. The filter also provides >98% filter efficiency which is an important aspect in keeping our people safe.

The approach was collaborative partnership with our existing supplier to solve a problem for both us and for them. It was a WIN-WIN-WIN situation. A win for us, a win for them and a win for the planet. The AT Executive Leadership Team tasked AT Procurement to consider how we might solve the waste problem generated by facemasks from our activities.





“ The mask trial was perfect. I really like the masks and have used them every single day since I received them. ”

Jaspal Singh:
Facilities Operations team

The Impact

The impact of the trial was that we were able to repurpose several of AT’s unneeded uniforms, provide a reusable (or washable) facemask to our frontline staff that met best practice health and safety standards and ensured that several hundred disposable facemasks did not make it to landfill.

Natalia Bertolo De Vere’s Sustainability Lead noted “We are actively working on alternatives for both our discontinued stock and also the used/discarded uniforms we currently house. Hopefully, through collaborations like this one, we’ll find creative solutions to give all these garments a second life cycle. That’s definitely the preferred path to take.”

Most importantly was the positive feedback from our staff. Jaspal Singh from the Facilities Operations team said “The mask trial was perfect. I really like the masks and have used them every single day since I received them. Thank you to your team for organising.”

This project between AT and De Vere is a clear example of how sustainable procurement and collaborative partnering is a win-win for all. It is one way that we can work together to solve some of the world’s most pressing challenges.

Lessons Learnt

- 1 Sustainable procurement is not about being harder or more work but instead about being smarter, more creative and more collaborative in how we approach our business needs.
- 2 There are many ways to approach sustainability through the supply chain. Sometimes the best way is to sit down and work through a problem with our existing suppliers so that it is a win for all of us.

If you would like to understand more about sustainable procurement or collaborative partnering you can contact the AT procurement team at procurement@at.govt.nz.