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Sixty seconds on . . . waste PPE

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Waste not, want not?

Absolutely. And with such a high volume of used personal protective equipment (PPE) piling up across the globe, one Indian fashion designer has decided to put her skills to good use by turning PPE offcuts into mattresses for patients with covid-19.

How did that idea spring up?

Lakshmi Menon had the brainwave after hearing that covid care centres in the Indian state of Kerala were finding it hard to source mattresses because they had to be incinerated every time a patient was discharged. The *Guardian* reported¹ how she decided to turn plastic offcuts from factories that make PPE into mattresses that are now being used in covid centres.

She's clearly not asleep on the job

Not likely. India is thought to be the second largest PPE manufacturer in the world, and the country's textile ministry estimates that manufacturers are producing 4.5m pieces of PPE a day.

That's a lot of mattresses

Indeed. Menon's shayya—which translates as mattresses in Sanskrit—has been widely taken up across Kerala, and she is also working with non-governmental organisations to provide shayyas to homeless shelters and rough sleepers. The United Nations has even added the shayya to a list of innovative ideas that can be easily replicated.

That's sew good to hear. Do we know of other innovative uses for PPE waste?

Yes we do. In Wales, for example, scientists at Swansea University are researching a new technique to recycle single use covid facemasks, plastic aprons, and visors into green fuel by using sunlight to break the items down into hydrogen.²

What about reusing PPE in clinical settings?

Public Health England actually gave guidance last April that recommended reusing PPE in the face of shortages. But doctors and others expressed safety concerns.³

1 Dhillon A. New-sprung: the project turning PPE offcuts into covid patient mattresses. *Guardian* 4 January 2021. www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/jan/04/project-turning-india-ppe-offcuts-mattresses-covid-patients.

2 Messenger S. Covid: PPE "could be recycled" with help of sunlight. *BBC News*. 22 December 2020. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-55396511.

3 Rimmer A. Covid-19: Experts question guidance to reuse PPE. *BMJ* 2020;369:m1577. doi: 10.1136/bmj.m1577 pmid: 32312734