

# The mask boom cools off

**SNABRÜCK** (dpa). A few months ago, there was a hectic rush of activity in the production rooms of snabrück-based automotive supplier Zender. When the automotive market collapsed due to the Coronavirus pandemic and manufacturers brought their production lines to a halt, the supplier quickly switched to a product in short supply: Instead of manufacturing interior panelling parts for luxury cars, Zender instead made respiratory masks for several weeks. Instead of implementing short-time work, 10 temporary workers were employed at short notice, says Ina Guth, Head of the new Personal Protective Equipment business unit. "We were also able to use existing machinery from the automotive sector for mask production."

In the meantime, the machine hall is quiet again. "In June, demand fell," says Guth. The market is now saturated and hospitals and GP's are well stocked with masks. Even so, automotive supplier Zender, which has an Italian parent



**The production of protective face masks has declined. There is now sufficient supply.** Photo: dpa

company, wants to continue producing masks in the future: "This is a new business area that we have entered into with utmost seriousness." The company has started to develop a customer base.

Flashback: When the Coronavirus pandemic hit one country after another, one low-cost item became a scarce commodity worldwide. Production of basic surgical masks and high-protection FFP2 and FFP3 masks

had been outsourced from the high-wage countries of the West to Asia for years. However, masks were now also urgently needed in German hospitals. The federal government intervened and tried to buy scarce masks from China. At one time there was a global competition for the masks, with prices to match.

German politicians demanded that reliable mask production should return to Germany, even if the production costs are higher

than in China, for example. Once the Coronavirus pandemic has been overcome, nobody in the business world should fear that the price alone will decide whether a contract is awarded or not, said Stephan Weil, Minister President of Lower Saxony, when visiting Zender at the beginning of April.

Many companies stepped in—not just automotive suppliers but also textile companies. According to a survey by the German Federation of Textiles and Fashion Industries, an estimated 22 million masks were produced per week from April to the beginning of May, of which around 2.5 million were FFP masks, 7.5 million surgical masks and 12 million everyday masks.