

Top protection wear for wildfire fighters

LAUREN BUCKLE

MATERIAL made from 100% cottons is what stands between Working on Fire firefighters and the blazes of wildfires across South Africa.

The fire-resistant wear is made right here in Wynberg, Cape Town.

Kishugu clothing provides wild-fire-resistant clothing to Working on Fire (WoF) who work across the country.

The WoF firefighters assisted in putting out the most recent fires around Cape Town. Narander Leeuwner, divisional manager and corporate communications at Kishugu, said: "They are specifically trained for this work, and are gratified that they have been able to help reduce the harm that unwanted wildfire causes."

The WoF programme is also aimed at alleviating poverty through providing work opportunities.

WoF provided wildfire fighting training and the programme purchases fire attire from Kishugu clothing. The WoF programme aims to use locally-sourced materials and Kishugu makes use of only South African materials.

Leeuwner said: "With the safety of our staff and the wildfire fighters top of mind, we are able to exercise strict control on standards to make sure wildfire fighters get the best personal protection wear available. Kishugu clothing meets and exceeds the standard."

Leeuwner said: "As the premier provider of Integrated Fire Management (IFM) solutions in southern Africa and the implementer of the government's Working on Fire Programme, it made practical and business sense to bring the manufacture of Personal Protection Wear (PPE) for wildfire fighters and the private sector in-house."

They work with materials that can stand around 55°C temperatures.

Rob Winter, managing director at Kishugu clothing in Wynberg, said: "All materials at some degree burn, even pure cotton will burn, but it burns at a higher temperature. With cotton being a natural fibre, it does not start melting whereas polyester does and typically you get a worse burn from the materials melting and fusing into your skin than from an actual flame itself."

The manufacturing begins in the cutting room where large pieces of material are cut from a ream and set on top of one another. They afterwards set a sheet on top showing how to cut the material and they then use machinery to cut out the pieces of material. The cut outs are then taken



Kishugu clothing makes wildfire-resistant clothing for Working on Fire. They are currently working on expanding into the working force market as a whole.

PICTURES: LAUREN BUCKLE



to be set into clothing packages containing all of the material needed to make the items.

Each package will contain the parts to make between 10 and 20 of the same products. This is then sent to the sewing area.

The sewing area is filled with the sound of sewing machines and music

as the clothes are pulled together into existence.

Each employee in the line sews one area so that when the material gets to the end of the line it has been created into a clothing product. Sonja Yon, supervisor for the line, said that when they are making the pants for the firewear they make about 31 pairs

per hour on the line.

"We are looking into expanding into workwear as a whole," said Winter.

Kishugu clothing intends to expand beyond the WoF programme into the municipalities and the local fire departments.

They currently supply only into the WoF programme.