

Breathing easier in global health crisis

VALERINA CHANGARATHIL



KTE commercial director Henri Hugo in the company's factory with some respiratory tubing. Picture: Tait Schmaal

MELROSE Park manufacturer Key Tubing & Electrical is playing a crucial role in saving lives across the world as the fight against COVID-19 continues.

KTE is an exclusive supplier of a highly specialised thin heater cable for a large multinational healthcare giant that uses them as part of its respiratory-care systems, specifically inside the tubes that deliver warm, moist oxygen to patients on ventilators.

Before the COVID-19-linked demand kicked in – as early as February from makeshift hospitals in Wuhan, China, the epicentre of the COVID-19 crisis – KTE was making three million metres of these cables a month.

It is now making seven million metres of the cable – enough for one million patients needing breathing assistance – but has been asked to ramp it up to 12 million metres a month.

“We knew this was going to get serious in February, much before the pandemic hit home,” said Henri Hugo, commercial director of KTE.

“We are simply component suppliers to other major companies, but just this one product is significantly going to transform our business.

“As passionate believers in local manufacturing, we have always invested in R&D, which first led us to develop this tube for this customer.

“Now we need to expand our factory significantly, with all the new machinery being made in-house, which is an extremely difficult task.

“That would not be possible without our exceptional team of engineers, led by our engineering manager Tony Smith. Our growing capacity to meet this increasing demand is testament to strong engineering teams and skills in Adelaide.”

KTE has been manufacturing in Adelaide for more than 70 years. Once a supplier of copper components and most of the electrical components used in the manufacture of refrigerators in Australia, it was forced to diversify when manufacturing moved offshore.

“KTE now makes engineered copper tube and electrical components for a vast array of industries, from caravans to air conditioners and, of course, exporting heater cable to a large international healthcare company.”

When the business gets to the 12 million metre a month mark in terms of production, it will be enough to treat two million patients.

The sale of the cables is set to contribute to a 25 per cent surge in annual revenue for the business, which employs 60 staff.

KTE was established in Adelaide in 1941 by Norman Key, who produced copper tubing for local white goods manufacturers.