

Buying Safe Products

Public Policy Statement

Committed to reducing deaths and injuries through electrical accidents at home and at work

www.esc.org.uk

Although the UK has a fair record of electrical safety, there are still over 30 deaths, nearly 4,000 injuries and 8,000 fires in people's homes every year². Faulty or damaged household appliances are responsible for the vast majority of incidents.

Consumers buying from international and private sellers online are at particular risk. Cheap electrical items such as small kitchen appliances, chargers and adapters are most likely to be hazardous. Many others are below standard or incompatible with the UK's electrical system.

Unlike other consumer products, there is no legal requirement for electrical products to be independently checked for safety before they are placed on the UK market. Manufacturers can also self-certify that products comply with safety standards and use the official CE mark.

The current regulatory system is abused by a small minority of manufacturers, potentially misleading consumers into buying electrical products that sometimes fall below safety standards. Furthermore, consumers with legitimate cause for complaint often find it difficult to get redress from online retailers.

Although many thousands of sub-standard and counterfeit electrical products are seized by local trading standards authorities every year, resources could sometimes be better directed to identify and bring enforcement action against rogue operators throughout the supply chain.

What we are doing

Our forthcoming *Guide to Buying Electrical Products Online* will help consumers to make more informed decisions about buying electrical appliances and to complain effectively if things go wrong. The guide will be widely promoted to consumers under our *Safer Products Campaign*.

We are working with the Trading Standards Institute and others to improve systems for sharing information and to carry out independent research and testing of potentially unsafe products. This will enable more joined-up and effective enforcement.

In partnership with the British Retail Consortium, we are developing best practice guidance about placing electrical products on the UK market, including relevant safety standards. The guide will be promoted across the international supply chain.

We support government plans for tougher enforcement against online fraud and safety testing at major UK entry ports, which will complement factory raids overseas. A single register for consumer complaints and advocacy to

help groups of consumers take legal action are also encouraging.

At the European level, we are seeking to influence a new legislative framework to improve market surveillance of imported electrical products, strengthen border controls and clarify the meaning of CE marking, in the interests of consumer safety.

What you can do

- 1 Help to raise electrical product safety standards, from local campaigning to supporting us in parliament
- 2 Encourage anyone concerned about electrical products to contact trading standards in their local authority

Know Your Facts

About 25% of all hazardous products across Europe are small electrical items – with the majority posing a significant risk of electric shock, fire and burns¹.

¹ EU Rapex system 2006;

² DTI 2002 and CLG 2007.

A Hidden Problem

There could be far more injuries resulting from electricity than we think because government hasn't provided data since 2002.

Our Ambitions

- An increase in screening and testing of electrical products arriving at UK points of entry
- All major online electrical retailers to display a consumer complaints and redress policy online

Contact us

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