



All Party Parliamentary Group
On Home Electrical Safety

Electrical Products – Setting a Course for Safety

Responses to the All Party Parliamentary
Group on Home Electrical Safety's Call
for Evidence on Product Recall and
Electrical Product Safety in the UK

JULY 2018

This is not an official publication of the House of Commons or the House of Lords, and has not been approved by either the House or its committees.

The All Party Parliamentary Group Home Electrical Safety is an informal group of Members of both Houses with a common interest in electrical safety in the home. This report was written on behalf of the APPG Home Electrical Safety by Electrical Safety First, the Group Secretariat provider.

Introduction

Carolyn Harris MP, Chair of the Home Electrical Safety All Party Parliamentary Group



As Chair of the Home Electrical Safety All-Party Parliamentary Group I am pleased to introduce this report, which I believe will contribute to the ongoing need to improve electrical product safety in the UK.

We can all take the safety of our products for granted. High standards and effective, intelligent enforcement mean that most of us never worry that our lives and property may be at risk, or have to deal with the damage and misery that can result when electrical products fail.

Sadly, in the two years that the APPG has been running we have seen investigations into fires of electrical origin at Shepherd's Court, a court case on Lakanal House, and of course

the tragedy of Grenfell Tower. These high-profile incidents are just the tip of the iceberg – every year, up and down the country thousands of domestic fires are caused by electrical products. And, whilst often only reported in local news or briefly in the national press, many of those incidents result in personal tragedies just as devastating to families as the incidents that make the evening news.

It is at the very core of the APPG's work that future events such as these must be prevented from happening. This requires an informed overview of the many interlocking factors that keep products safe – from the standards which guide the designer from the very beginning all the way to the point of sale and beyond.

The questions posed by the call for evidence reflect the concerns brought to the attention of the APPG. It is our intent that the submissions received in response to these questions form the key points for action going forwards.

The APPG looks forward to the Government's response and working with the newly formed Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS), which has the potential to deal with many of the issues. We wish the Office well but we are here to help it with the issues given the wide-ranging expert representation from APPG attendees.

I thank all of those who have contributed their valuable insight towards this report. Their testimony makes it clear that action must be taken and, more importantly, offers potential solutions in order to achieve this much needed change.



Carolyn Harris MP

Summary of Conclusions

Key Recommendations:

1. Product Recall

The OPSS has the potential to significantly improve support for product recall – **pressure from all sectors is necessary to ensure the office is effective** and that the promised **single point of reference for product recall** is delivered.

The OPSS must be **balanced and independent** to ensure that consumer safety is the main priority

A **clear and comprehensive strategy document** is needed so that all stakeholders can better understand what the Office intends, and how it will tackle product recall effectively.

2. General Electrical Product Safety

The overall **design and construction** of products should be considered. Emphasis should be on containment and ensuring products are safe before they reach the market, rather than fire resistant materials and similar mitigation strategies.

The sale of **second hand electrical goods** must be monitored and controlled.

An **accident and injury database** has the potential to deliver significant benefits – **the Government must clarify why there are no plans to implement such a proposal.**

3. BREXIT and Product Safety Impacts

The UK Product Standardisation process must be maintained – **The government must make its position clear.**

CE marking and related systems are valued by business and consumers and should be maintained.

Co-operation and information sharing with the EU must continue.

4. Fridge Freezer voluntary marking scheme

Market research to determine the effectiveness of such voluntary product markings and what form they should take – the BEIS Behavioural insight unit may be well placed for this task. This should include discussions with manufacturers and retailers on their willingness to implement and promote such a marking scheme.

Development of a proposed **set of requirements** that an appliance must meet to qualify for the marking.

Overview

A roadmap for electrical product safety

This call for evidence is intended to help provide potential workable solutions which can be presented to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) on electrical product safety in the UK.

There have been many reviews and reports on the current situation with product safety, particularly in regards to Brexit. At this stage there has been sufficient assessment of the current landscape to show that there are many failings in the current product safety system, particularly recently

with the BEIS Parliamentary Select Committee undertaking a one-off session on product safety and several Parliamentary debates.

What this report proposes, through stakeholder contribution, is to take stock and develop a series of concrete and achievable solutions.

To achieve this, four key questions were posed to stakeholders, reflecting industry and consumer concerns at the time of writing:

1. Product Recall

Given the recent assessments of the problems affecting consumer product recall, such as the Lynn Faulds Wood review and Working Group report, do you agree that insufficient progress has been made, and what steps would provide effective and achievable remedies?

2. General Electrical Product Safety

Besides product recall, what do you consider to be the most significant risks to consumers posed by domestic electrical products, and how could these most effectively be mitigated?

3. Brexit and Product Safety impacts

After Britain leaves the EU, what challenges and opportunities do you envisage for providing a product safety system that will protect consumers? What needs to be protected in terms of electrical safety and what must the UK Government improve in terms of legislation after the UK leaves the EU?

4. Fridge / Freezer safety marking

How effective would a consumer-orientated marking or logo for identifying fridge freezers fitted with a flame retardant back, safety tested to an agreed standard, be in the current UK market? What would need to be considered for any such scheme?

Background

Whilst the UK enjoys one of the best product safety regimes in Europe, there is still significant room for improvement, which has been highlighted by recent tragic events and several high-profile and controversial product recall and other corrective actions affecting many thousands of products. Public recognition of the risks has also been growing, in particular those posed by “white goods” – appliances such as fridge freezers and tumble dryers at the heart of domestic life, which are either always switched on or used on a daily basis.

The UK product recall system was the subject of a major review, led by Lynn Faulds Wood and published in February 2016, and subsequently the then Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Corporate Responsibility, Margot James MP, requested a report on Product Recalls and Safety from a working group of the same name. These reviews identified many failings and proposed a number of recommendations to improve the efficacy of product recalls and similar safety actions, but since publication there is so far little sign

that the recommendations have been taken on board, and therefore millions of potentially unsafe appliances remain in unsuspecting homes.

Additionally, there is concern over the effectiveness of the product safety enforcement regime for protecting the public, due largely in part to cuts to trading standards services but also potential need for new legislation to tackle safety issues associated with the rise of internet sales. This has the potential to be exacerbated by the UK's exit of the European Union, as a large part of UK product safety legislation directly derives from EU law, and UK market surveillance engages in cooperation and intelligence sharing with its EU counterparts.

The internet has provided a new sales platform for counterfeit, second-hand and substandard electrical products. This further puts the public at risk and undermines legitimate brands and retailers. Damaged and recalled second-hand products have also been frequently identified for sale over on-line sales platforms.

Finally, there has been growing public concern over the safety of domestic fridge freezers, focusing in particular on the non-flame retardant material on the backing of some fridge freezers. Typically made of highly flammable material, fridge freezers with these types of backing have been identified by bodies such as the London Fire Brigade as posing a serious safety risk, significantly accelerating the rapid spread and severity of any fire involving the appliance. This risk can be mitigated by enclosing the entire back of fridge freezers in fire resistant material to limit the spread of fire, but at present there is no requirement in the product standard to have such a backing or any universal means for consumers to identify which appliances have this type of protective measure fitted voluntarily by the manufacturer.

This call for evidence is intended to inform a report covering the above issues and to provide clear, achievable recommendations for improvement.

The APPG would like to thank all those who have responded to the call for evidence.

Response summary

1. Product Recall

Given the recent assessments of the problems affecting consumer product recall, such as the Lynn Faulds Wood review and Working Group report, do you agree that insufficient progress has been made, and what steps would provide effective and achievable remedies?

Note: Since the call for evidence for this report was distributed, the government has announced the creation of a new office, the Office for Product Safety and Standards, to cover many of the issues discussed in this report.

The Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS)

This has been established since the call for evidence was released. The Government state that the Office will be a “national oversight body tasked with identifying consumer risks and managing responses to large-scale product recalls and repairs”.

The Office was the subject of a Westminster Hall debate, held on the 9th of May 2018¹, in which the creation of the OPSS was universally welcomed. However concern was expressed that not enough detail had been provided on the specifics

of the work the Office will take on and how it will ensure it is an effective regulator. The Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Corporate Responsibility responded with further detail on the Office, and a reassurance that consumer protection is an upmost priority, and that the Office will be able to hold business to account.

The Minister further clarified that the office has a £25 million budget for 2018-19, and intends to employ approximately 290 persons across 3 sites. These are known

to be London, Birmingham and Teddington, where the office will have testing facilities.

Whilst the creation of the Office and the further detail supplied by the Minister is an extremely positive development from the perspective of this report, at the time of writing the full scope of what the Office will be responsible for and the strategy intended are yet to be published. This being so, a full assessment of how the Office will affect the findings of this investigation is not possible at present.

The comments on this question were split, and must be viewed in light of the establishment of the OPSS. Whilst most respondents made note of the establishment of the OPSS, some submissions were made before the announcement.

AMDEA felt that there has been considerable progress, noting not only the establishment of the OPSS but particularly the new PAS 7100, “Code of practice on consumer product safety related recalls and other corrective actions”, prepared by BSI, published in March 2018. This PAS is intended to address several major issues with the handling of product recall, providing practical guidance on good practice, including the need to monitor feedback and react when necessary.

It was felt by one submission that the only truly effective way to “police” the industry would be through an Independent Agency. This would be similar to that recommended in the Lynn Faulds Wood report, a call for the establishment of an agency such as the US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), which is intended to be an independent organisation working in the consumer interest. A key point made was that the committee or similar group overseeing the activities of such an organisation must not be predominantly filled with manufacturers and their representatives.

It was suggested by one submission that further research was needed on the approach towards recall in other

countries, and the solutions in place, in order to inform the UK approach.

Regarding a central recall register, the need for promotion of its existence was raised several times. It was felt that many consumers would be unlikely to visit a central listing website unless sufficient promotion of this resource was undertaken to bring it to consumers’ attention.

The availability of such a site, provided that it is kept, updated and maintained by BEIS, is an important tool to aid market surveillance, and will give reassurance to those concerned that a product may have been the subject of a recall.

¹ <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2018-05-09/debates/858A6DFE-B050-466F-AB11-156A2C4685D3/OfficeForProductSafetyAndStandards>

One submission stated that research on the issue of consumer attitudes to product recall had been conducted, and that they would be happy to share the findings.

It was pointed out that the main impediment to successful recall actions remains the problem of locating the affected appliances. The given example of the impact this can have was the car industry, which is in most cases able to contact a consumer directly about the actual product that they possess. This is far more effective than other methods, including general information campaigns or mail-outs. This being so, it is felt that one of the priority activities of the OPSS should be the promotion of product registration. An example of such a scheme was provided, that of the industry-led Register My Appliance website.

A mention was made of the importance of considering the change in construction materials in modern appliances, which now rely heavily on lightweight plastics and foams. These materials do not increase the risk of a fire starting, but in the event of a component failure the fire spread and intensity may be significantly enhanced by these materials.

An example given was of a hypothetical failure of the heating element in a washing machine in both an older and a modern appliance. In older appliances the result of such a failure would be a smell of burning and some internal damage. However, in more modern appliances the use of ignitable plastic coated drums means that the fire can much more easily spread within the appliance, increasing the possibility of the containment failing, resulting in fire spreading to the rest of the property. Despite being similar in appearance to their predecessors, appliances are not the same as they were even a short time ago, and may behave substantially differently in a fire situation – this must be taken into account when considering the risk

posed by products, and factored into recall decisions.

It was suggested that the under-resourcing of enforcement was a factor which enabled many safety issues to continue for years before any action is taken. It was felt to be clear that manufacturer interpretation of risk assessments, which forms a part of the decision to issue a product recall, are misinterpreted. Often public awareness is more instrumental in initiating a recall, and it was stated that the length of time between manufacturers becoming aware of a product issue and issuing a recall has often been many years.

In terms of technological solutions, a submission from **Vodafone UK** suggested that there was potential for the “Internet of Things” (IOT) to play a part. Connected appliances would be able to be contacted directly by the manufacturer in the event of any safety action, which would have the potential to be a cost-effective way to increase the success rate of such actions by a significant amount, dependent on whether the home in question is connected.

Conclusion

The establishment of the Office for Product Safety and Standards is felt by all who commented on it to be a positive development, as is the new PAS on product recall. However, the overall issues affecting product recall remain the same as identified in previous reports. It must be ensured that the Office is an effective overseer and regulatory force, and not just a paper exercise. Key among the requirements for the Office to succeed

is that it is **independent** and **balanced** – the views and priorities of business must not guide the work of the OPSS at the expense of public safety.

When the Office was announced, the creation of a **single point of reference for product recall** was one of the key initiatives the office would undertake. **More detail and clear commitments** are needed on how this is intended to proceed, and how it will be publicised.

Overall, a **comprehensive strategy document** detailing the full scope of the office’s intended work is needed.

Elsewhere, innovative thinking is needed. Connected appliances and other technological solutions have the potential to significantly improve the success rate of product recalls, and should be investigated further.

2. General Electrical Product Safety

Besides product recall, what do you consider to be the most significant risks to consumers posed by domestic electrical products, and how could these most effectively be mitigated?

Response summary

The issue of successful mitigation requires better policing with adequate resources by Trading Standards or their replacement by another Agency.

A concern raised in the responses to this question, also raised by respondents to the first question, was the danger inherent with the increased use of plastics in the construction of white goods, and in particular the risks that the use of products similar to PU foam create. In a sentiment echoed by many, it is clear that the overall design of products needs to be considered from a containment perspective. The focus on the flammability of fridge freezer backings (Covered in question four) does not necessarily reflect whether the product should be considered safe or otherwise. While the increased use of potentially flammable materials may increase the risk of severity of any fire occurring, the priority should always be on preventing or limiting the extent of the fire in the first place.

The issue of the sale of second hand and counterfeit electrical goods, both via conventional retail and online, was raised by several respondents. The concerns revolve around the quality of these products, and the likelihood that, for cost reasons, vulnerable members of the community will be the most likely to suffer the potential negative consequences inherent in these products.

It was stated that recalled electrical products had been identified on sale both in High Street stores and online, and there was no means in most cases for the potential purchaser to identify whether a product is either subject to a recall notice or similar safety action, or whether any repair has been carried out on the appliance. Investigations conducted by the **London Fire Brigade** highlighted the fact that there are no effective warnings or controls present on online sales platforms to prevent persons listing for sale or buying dangerous recalled products. It was noted that the number of potentially dangerous recalled but unmodified white goods in circulation could number to well over a million products. If online marketplaces clearly required all sellers of electrical goods to confirm that they have checked that the items they list were not subject to any safety action or recall notice this could provide a cost effective solution, with minimal burden on the platforms themselves.

It is therefore felt there is a need for clear government guidance that any second hand electrical goods offered for sale must be checked for corrective safety action and/or recall, which should be supported by appropriate proactive market surveillance and enforcement.

A further point of interest with regards to how manufacturers engage with the public was that there is no

requirement for manufacturers to make public risk assessments carried out upon products after a recall action has taken place, even in an edited format (to preserve commercial interests regarding product design). Whilst of limited interest or accessibility to the general public, the availability of such documents would be useful in explaining to the public why safety actions are required.

It was also stated that sleeping risk must be addressed as part of any risk assessment, which is not currently the case. The inclusion of this risk could significantly change how manufacturers respond to product safety issues.

Several respondents, including the **British Retail Consortium**, raised the issue of accident and injury data, which is no longer captured in any significant way. It is felt that such data would be of great value in identifying problem products and informing future product design and standards development. Such data would include details of the product involved, how it was involved in the accident and the severity. Such a system exists in a limited form in the United States, and formerly existed in the UK. It should be noted that during the Westminster Hall debate on the OPSS the issue of an injury database was put to the Minister, who stated that at present there are no plans to reinstate any such system.

Conclusion

Based upon the responses, the key perceived risks to consumers are product design, particularly with regard to the use of plastics and PU foam, and second hand and counterfeit products sold online. Online retail platforms or marketplaces must be more proactive in fulfilling their responsibilities to their users and society in general in order to help tackle these problem products.

Enforcement must be **adequately resourced**. Repeated reference has been made to a perceived lack of resources for enforcement, and this should be investigated and remedied as a priority action.

Risk assessments should be made public in the event of a safety action, and factors such as sleeping risk should be investigated for inclusion as standard practice.

Collection of accident and injury data. Whilst there would be a cost involved in both setting up such a system and its operation, there are felt to be significant potential benefits. Despite the re-introduction of a national injury database being a key recommendation of the Independent review into product recall (The Lynn Faulds Wood report), when questioned the current minister responsible has stated that BEIS has no plans to reintroduce such a system. **It would be productive for all parties if the Government explained in clear terms the rationale behind this decision.**

3. Brexit and Product Safety Impacts

After Britain leaves the EU, what challenges and opportunities do you envisage for providing a product safety system that will protect consumers? What needs to be protected in terms of electrical safety and what must the UK Government improve in terms of legislation after the UK leaves the EU?

European Commission systems

RAPEX is the European Commission's Rapid Alert System for non-food dangerous products. RAPEX facilitates the rapid exchange of information between the national authorities of 31 countries and the European Commission on dangerous products found on the market. If a manufacturer or distributor finds out that one of their products on sale is dangerous, they have to inform the competent national contact in charge of receiving and dealing with alerts of dangerous non-food consumer products sent, according to the General Product Safety Directive.

Website:
https://ec.europa.eu/consumers/consumers_safety/safety_products/rapex/alerts/repository/content/pages/rapex/index_en.htm

Whilst UK authorities and consumers will still be able to access the RAPEX alert webpage regardless of the final agreement after Brexit, it is at present unclear as to what the future arrangement for intelligence sharing will be. It should be noted that whilst a memorandum of understanding is in place between the EC and the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), this is not equivalent to the full access currently available to UK market surveillance.

A companion to RAPEX is the Information and Communication System on Market Surveillance (ICSMS). This is a system for facilitating communication between market surveillance bodies, both within the EU and in those in the EFTA. It enables intelligence sharing on non-compliant products identified by participating countries, and in doing so is intended to both make the removal of unsafe products from the market easier and, in minimising the duplication of work, make market surveillance more efficient and effective overall.

The role of RAPEX and the sharing of important safety data, and cooperation with EU market surveillance bodies in the future are presently unclear. Ways should be found to continue this process. Dependent upon the outcome of negotiations, the UK will either need to set up its own equivalent institutions or ensure that contacts and cooperation with EU and other international institutions are maintained. The OPSS is felt to be the appropriate body to oversee this.

One response urged the need to wait and see what the final shape of the UK's relationship with the EU will be after Brexit, however the need for consumer protection is felt to be a priority issue. The need to ensure that there is no lowering of product safety standards in any form was an almost

universal sentiment, and the risk of the UK becoming a "dumping ground" for substandard goods was raised. One response made the case that the UK cannot compete globally on price, and instead needs to do so on quality and safety.

The **Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service** response proposed that the OPSS and BSI should undertake a review of the current standards and legislation in force in the UK. This would be to ensure all relevant EU standards and legislation are incorporated into UK law after Brexit, as a safeguard against negative regulatory divergence. This would also provide an opportunity to identify weaknesses in current EU legislation and remedy these weaknesses. After Brexit the public should have confidence that once an evidence based need for change

has been identified, appropriate and timely changes to standards should be possible.

It was put forward that it is imperative that the UK decides how manufacturers will attest conformity in the future, and several responses discussed the importance of CE Marking and Harmonised Standards to the current UK product safety regime. The CE mark is the manufacturer's declaration that (certain categories of) any product meets the minimum requirements of all applicable Directives.

At present, most electrical goods are required to be CE marked and to comply with harmonised European Safety Standards, both to aid consumer identification and to assist in the free movement of products

across national borders. It must be made clear what the plans are for the future of CE marking, and it is important that there should be no additional burden on businesses. This concern over future plans extends to the Type Approval system and the role

of recognised third party experts and Notified Bodies – the status of these experts, bodies and systems must be clarified.

Despite the overall concern expressed about the impacts of Brexit on product safety, the submission from **CTSI** noted

that the increased border checks required under some scenarios may result in greater scrutiny of incoming goods. Similarly, that after leaving the European Union, the UK would have, in theory, the ability to legislate and standardise relatively quickly.

Conclusion

At the time of writing it is still unclear what form the future relationship with the European Union will take after the UK leaves. However a number of key points were made across the submissions on the absolute necessity of maintaining the UK's current regulatory and enforcement regime, and the information sharing with European agencies. **Consumer protection must be the priority, according to those who made representations to this inquiry.**

The key recommendation is that the government must commit, in no uncertain terms, to ensuring that a useful relationship with EU regulatory and enforcement agencies and other bodies remains in place, regardless of the shape of the final withdrawal arrangement reached. **BEIS must make clear how it intends to retain or enhance the current relationships, and detail the role the OPSS will play in this activity.**

This must include **retaining the role of CE marking, clarity on the future role of existing pan-EU systems** and a commitment to avoid any **negative regulatory divergence.**

4. Fridge / Freezer safety marking

How effective would a consumer-orientated marking or logo for identifying fridge freezers fitted with a flame retardant back, safety tested to an agreed standard, be in the current UK market? What would need to be considered for any such scheme?

The responses to this question are mixed. Whilst there is acknowledgment that the current consumer environment is in need of improvement, there are also concerns that such a mark may not be effective and may even end up being counterproductive.

The National Fire Chief's Council reported that they had enquiries from members of the public seeking clarity on how to identify safe fridge freezers at the point of purchase, showing that there is a level of consumer demand for some means of identifying fridge freezers with enhanced safety in design. The NFCC propose that a marking or similar logo could meet this requirement, awarded only after sufficient – and realistic – testing. This was echoed by a submission made in a personal capacity, which made clear that any marking should be backed with authority, to prevent it becoming a means to sell products rather than improve consumer decision making and safety. It was noted by **ANEC** that warnings and labels may also be used as a substitute for safe design, so safeguards must be in place to ensure this is not the case.

This testing would be a prerequisite, as one submission stated there is evidence-based concern that some fridge freezers which self-identify as having a fire-resistant backing do not perform as consumers would expect when subjected to real-world fire conditions.

As a counter to these proposals, several submissions to this call for evidence make the case that any such marking would be ineffective and add clutter to an already crowded visual landscape present on products, mixing with energy rating stickers, for example. It was pointed out that many consumers may be unaware that fridge freezers were ever sold without a flame resistant backing, and so the presence or absence of such a marking would have no effect unless a significant and successful consumer awareness campaign was enacted.

One response proposed that this is an area that the BEIS Behavioural Insights team could work on. There is evidence from across the industry that consumers are interested in knowing more about potential purchases from a safety perspective, but the drivers

for this must be fully understood.

There is also concern that for many consumers, particularly those shopping at the lower or budget end of the market, the only consideration will be cost – if enhanced safety comes at a price the mark will make no headway with this demographic.

Given recent changes to some relevant standards the case was made by **Tech UK** for caution, and that the industry should allow for more time to assess the effect of these changes.

A submission made in a personal capacity described purchasing appliances just before responding to the call for evidence, during which they saw that a triangle label stating that products had a fire resistant backing was in use, which influenced the purchase decision. This demonstrates that the labelling could be effective, but it would need to be seen what the effect of such labelling would be on the general public, who may not be as attuned to such initiatives as persons professionally involved in product safety.

Conclusion

The utility of a proposed marking is unclear at this stage. It is recommended that a mark should only be considered and promoted if it **demonstrates a clear safety benefit and is well-recognised by consumers.**

A marking applied only on the basis of whether or not the manufacturer considers the backing to be flame resistant would have the potential to be detrimental to the market and safety as a whole.

Submissions received

14 Submissions to the call for evidence have been received, both from official company representatives and on a personal basis:

The Association of Manufacturers of Domestic Electrical Appliances (AMDEA)	London Fire Brigade (LFB)
ANEC – The European Consumer Voice in Standardisation	Mick Beasley (London Fire Brigade, responding in a personal capacity)
British Retail Consortium	National Consumer Federation (NCF)
Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service	National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC)
Chris Evans – Responding in a personal capacity	Simon Long - Responding in a personal capacity
The Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI)	Tech UK
The Local Government Association (LGA)	Vodafone UK- Business Prototype Proposal



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