

# **Report to the Tyne and Wear Trading Standards Joint Committee**

**22 February 2018**

## **Update on Product Safety**

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### **Purpose of the report**

To update the Committee on the latest developments with the important issue of Product Safety.

### **The Safety of Electrical Goods**

1. On the 9 January 2018, the House of Commons, Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee published an updated report related to the “Safety of Electrical Goods”. Rachel Reeve MP (Leeds West) chairs this Committee and Anna Turley MP (Redcar) also sits on this Committee.
2. The Committee decided to look at the safety of electrical goods, following their identification as the cause of several high-profile fires recently, such as Grenfell and Shepherd’s Bush Green. The number of fires they cause each year is persistently high.

### **Summary of the Report**

3. The Committee found that reductions in funding for both local Trading Standards and National Trading Standards are inevitably having an impact on the adequacy of the existing system of product safety in the UK. This, combined with the devolved and fragmented nature of the current system, is making it difficult for consumers to have confidence in consistent enforcement of required standards across the UK.
4. The Committee found that progress on improving the safety of electrical goods has been painfully slow, despite a widely-supported set of recommendations made by Lynn Faulds Wood’s independent review, published nearly two years ago. The Committee recommends that the Government publish a full response to the Review by the end of February 2018.
5. The Committee found that the limitations of the existing product safety system to be exposed by the manufacturer Whirlpool’s response to a defect in its tumble dryers. As a result of its slow response, there are still a million potentially dangerous appliances in people’s homes. The Committee calls on Whirlpool to address this, by ensuring a resolution for customers with defective machines within two weeks of notification. In addition the Committee expressed unease that Whirlpool did not act when a separate defect came to light, which has caused a number of fires. The Committee recommends that manufacturers should make available their risk assessments as soon as any defect is identified.

6. The Committee expressed concern that there appears to be a significant risk associated with plastic-backed fridge freezers, based on the number of fires associated with them and on testing that demonstrates their flammability. The Committee believes that manufacturers should act now to use safer materials in advance of regulatory changes and that these products should be properly marked so that they can be identified following a fire.
7. Finally the Committee recommended that due to the fragmented nature of the existing system and the slow pace of change, the Government should carry out and publish a cost benefit analysis of the options for reallocating and concentrating existing resources, both centrally and locally, with a view to combining into a single national product safety agency.

### **Governments Response**

8. The Government on the 21 January 2018 announced the creation of a new national oversight body tasked with identifying consumer risks and managing responses to large-scale product recalls and repairs.
9. The new Office for Product Safety and Standards is seen as enabling the UK to meet the evolving challenges of product safety by responding to expanding international trade, the growth in online shopping and the increasing rate of product innovation.
10. The announcement comes as part of the government's response to the Working Group on Product Recalls and Safety. Established in October 2016 by former Consumer Minister Margot James MP, the group of product and fire safety experts was brought together to build on the recommendations made by Lynn Faulds Wood in her independent review into consumer product recalls.
11. In addition to providing support and advice for local authority Trading Standards teams, the office will co-ordinate work across local authorities where action is needed on a national scale and will ensure the UK continues to carry out appropriate border checks on imported products once the UK leaves the European Union.
12. The Government has promised to continue to work with stakeholders such as consumer groups, manufacturers and retailers to ensure the office coordinates the UK's product safety regime as effectively as possible.
13. This will not lessen any of the legal responsibilities that sit with manufacturers, importers and retailers to present safe products to the market, and to take rapid effective action when safety issues arise with their products.
14. Other actions as part of the government's response to the working group include:
  - working with the British Standards Institute to provide guidance on product recalls and corrective action,
  - conducting research to help manufacturers and retailers develop technological solutions to product marking and identification,

- increasing the reach of Primary Authority to further share business, local authority and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) expertise to help protect consumers,
- researching consumer behaviour to identify the best way to drive up the number of consumers registering appliances with manufacturers,
- creating an expert panel to bring together trade associations, consumer and enforcement representatives to advise on product safety issues as they arise.

### **Recommendations**

15. The Committee is asked to note the information contained within this report and copies of the reports from the House of Commons Business Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee and the Government response will be made available to Members.