

25th February 2016**Testing of Hoverboards**

Paul Dowling, Strategic Director, Communities and Environment, Gateshead Council.

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform the Committee of the involvement of the Metrology Laboratory in testing the electrical safety of the wheeled appliances commonly referred to as swegways or hoverboards.

Operational Issues

2. The media has carried many reports on the electrical and fire risks that these items have presented in the run up to Christmas.
3. Officers from Tyne & Wear procured boards from sellers in the region and submitted them to the Metrology Laboratory for an opinion on their electrical safety. Boards were also submitted by Northumberland for testing.
4. The Metrology Laboratory has the experience and equipment to offer screen testing only, that is not accredited testing.
5. The results from the testing were very discouraging and revealed numerous electrical faults which would render them dangerous. Of concern in some was the ability to keep supplying current to an already charged battery which then allows the battery to overheat and potentially ignite. Other problems included;
 - Non-compliant plugs: Cloverleaf plug with no fuse and non-approved fake plug with incorrect markings and counterfeit fuse (BSI approval kite mark back-to-front and fictitious approval body STGD).
 - No branding or manufacturers details on packaging or product
 - Misspellings on the packaging or product or instructions
 - Charger with no manufacturer details
 - No CE marking. Non-compliant CE marking. Very poor CE marking
6. Reports were issued to the officers who were then free to pursue any actions their authorities deemed appropriate.
7. In light of the concerns Gateshead made an appearance on ITV news warning the public about our concerns to add weight to the national coverage. Officers of the Metrology Laboratory appeared on camera to explain the inherent problems associated with the boards.
8. The Metrology Laboratory offered a service to the councils that if staff had purchased one of these items as a Christmas present they could bring it to the Lab for a quick safety check. The results were the same as from those previously tested.

9. Gateshead trading standards visited national retailers as well as local traders who were selling hoverboards for between £250 - £400. These boards didn't comply with electrical safety or traceability. The boards were seized until the traders could provide sufficient information to show compliance with the legislation. To date, the information has not been provided.
10. Sunderland Trading Standards have been actively involved in the patrolling of local and national retailers in relation to the safety of self-balancing scooters. Seven retailers were inspected, which resulted in one suspension notice being issued with the remainder withdrawing their products from sale and issuing recalls to their customers. One of the local retailers was identified as an importer and has been made aware of his obligations in relation to product safety as a result. In addition, several enquiries from concerned residents highlighted the trade in this type of product online. This resulted in a number of other local authorities nationwide being notified that they had importers in their area and assistance being provided to colleagues to bring these companies into compliance. Due to the direct intelligence obtained by Trading Standards Officers, Sunderland City Council issued a press release prior to Christmas to warn consumers as to the safety of hoverboards.
11. South Tyneside carried out 13 trader advisory/market surveillance visits and 1 market surveillance visit to the market place, of which:
 - 1 national trader was due to sell them but had suspension notice issued by another TS service (Close liaison with Inverclyde TS & Warwickshire TS regarding issues)
 - 1 national trader had previously sold them but had no stock left
 - 1 national trader advertised them as for sale in the store but customers were referred to their website.
 - 5 consumer complaints (all purchased online) incl. one which was tested at the Metlab.
 - 2 Consumers received full refund for the item
 - 3 consumers advised with regards to the legislation etc
 - South Tyneside Press release issued 15-12-15
(<http://www.southtyneside.gov.uk/article/29179/Safety-Concerns-Over-Hoverboards>)
12. National Trading Standards intends to draw a project brief together around the 'lessons to be learnt' from the hover boards issue and the significant impacts that the issue has had on many different parties including consumers, businesses, Government and Trading Standards services.

Recommendation

13. That the committee note the contents of the report and the involvement of the Metrology Laboratory's role in public safety.