

16th November 2023**Government testing confirms concern UK has
become a dumping ground for unsafe
products.**

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Gateshead Council**

Purpose of the report

1. To inform the Committee of a recent report by the Office for Product Safety and Standards' (OPSS) on online marketplace product testing and concerns at the high rate of non-compliance demonstrating that online marketplaces are still flooding the UK with unsafe goods and posing serious risks to UK consumers.

Background

2. OPSS carried out the testing of 2,260 products between October 2021 and September 2022, finding that 1,832 (81%) failed product safety testing. The product category with the highest rate of non-compliance was toys, posing a large risk to children, closely followed by small mains powered electricals.
3. The toys tested failed product safety testing on areas such as strangulation hazards to children under 36 months.
4. Electrical items failed testing against UK safety standards for electrical goods, which could pose a risk of electric shocks or electrical fires, presenting a serious concern for consumers.
5. Other areas of concern identified by the testing include:
 - Button batteries
 - PPE
 - Cosmetics
 - Chainsaw discs
 - Magnetic toys
6. The Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) said it was concerned about the overwhelmingly high rate of non-compliance, demonstrating that online

marketplaces are still flooding the UK with unsafe goods and posing serious risks to UK consumers.

7. CTSI Chief Executive, John Herriman, said: “We welcome the OPSS investigation into the safety of products being sold on online marketplaces. However, the sheer volume and proportion of goods that aren’t meeting basic safety checks is appalling – we have standards for a reason – including to protect the public’s health and safety.

It is concerning to see this level of products failing safety testing, particularly when the highest category of non-compliance is toys.

We would urge the Government to take action to stop unsafe products entering our supply chains and online marketplaces – this includes ensuring enough checks are taking place at ports and borders. We also call on online marketplaces to be more rigorous in undertaking checks across their platforms.

As well as calling for increased resources for Trading Standards, CTSI will continue to work with industry and product safety stakeholders to examine whether the current regulations and processes are enough to keep the UK economy fair and safe.”

8. The OPSS’ report has also confirmed findings by the British Toy and Hobby Association (BTHA) who have tested over 550 products in the last six years and have been pushing for a change in the law to ensure that the online marketplaces are jointly and severally liable for products sold by third parties via their platforms, which otherwise would not have access to the UK market.
9. Jerry Burnie OBE, Head of Compliance at the British Toy and Hobby Association (BTHA), commented “...We are pleased that OPSS’ own figures have now confirmed our findings and hope that sufficient action will be taken to ensure consumers are protected from these dangerous and unsafe products.”
10. The UK charity Electrical Safety First, who work with all sectors of the electrical industry have agreed that the evidence is overwhelming. It shows that online shopping is a minefield, with consumers unknowingly exposed to thousands of unsafe goods, many of which can be in their homes the very next day.
11. Lesley Rudd Chief Executive commented “Decisive action has never been so urgent, online marketplaces cannot be relied upon to self-regulate the issue of illegal and harmful goods on their platforms. The Government must act without delay to finally force them to take steps to ensure that these goods sold via their sites, from which they profit, are safe.”

Summary

12. Product standards are vital for maintaining a fair and safe UK economy and ensure that products are safe for children and adults alike. Standards also ensure a fair UK economy for businesses to compete in. Online marketplaces are not doing enough to deliver adequate product standards for consumers.

13. While it is common knowledge that the capacity of Trading Standards services is stretched as far as possible, the data published by OPSS demonstrates the need for further investment into the service, in order that the UK does not become a dumping ground for unsafe products sold online.

Recommendation

14. The Committee is asked to note the information.

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