

Clamping down on risk of unsafe PPE

News story

How OPSS is working to ensure the right PPE goes to the right healthcare workers as quickly as possible.



One million face masks have been intercepted at East Midlands Airport, as part of a zero-tolerance approach towards unsafe PPE that will not reliably protect those working at the frontline of the coronavirus crisis.

The Government is working hard to ensure the right PPE goes to the right healthcare workers as quickly as possible; whilst using intelligence-based intervention to keep products that will not protect out of the marketplace.

The Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS), within BEIS, examined an estimated one million face masks in a batch of consignments at East Midlands airport.

OPSS detained 700,000 suspect face masks, based on assessments of their quality, marking, certification and documentation. Masks and other items that could be shown to be safe were released for immediate use, including by businesses working at the frontline such as care homes.

OPSS is coordinating intelligence across the UK's ports and borders and has deployed an enforcement team to East Midlands Airport in response to information from Border Force.

OPSS Chief Executive Graham Russell said:

We are committed to supporting legitimate businesses who are working hard to increase the supply of PPE to health and social care settings. But anyone setting out to supply unsafe PPE, with fake certification and false safety marks, needs to know we take a zero-tolerance approach.

We will use all necessary enforcement powers to make sure unsafe PPE does not enter the supply chain and will take action against

importers who set out to flout important safety rules.

OPSS has seen a rise in intelligence relating to PPE products including sales of non-compliant or counterfeit face masks and hand sanitisers, being sold online, in shops and at markets.

300,000 items from the consignment have been cleared by OPSS personnel, actively protecting health workers against the pandemic. Unsafe PPE that cannot be re-worked or used safely in another setting will be quarantined or destroyed.

In notes

- OPSS has been working closely at East Midlands Airport with the Health and Safety Executive, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency and Leicestershire Trading Standards
- OPSS put in place two regulatory easement routes from 26 March, which maintain essential safety requirements, but streamline administrative processes to speed up supply of PPE to the NHS and other essential workers.
- For Government purchases for the NHS, PPE can be supplied without CE marking or conformity assessment, provided it meets essential safety requirements and is cleared by the Health and Safety Executive.
- As a result, manufacturers going through the approval process for sale or donation to the NHS can have new PPE approved in weeks rather than the months or years it can take under the normal system. In one example, a leading company (Apple) has gained regulatory approval for a new face mask with support from OPSS officials in just 10 days.
- Authorities in the Netherlands recalled 600,000 defective face masks manufactured in China.

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