

News story: Government to clamp down on unsafe lasers

The government has announced new measures to tackle the sale of unsafe laser pointers, including strengthening safeguards to stop high-powered lasers entering the country.

In a [response to a call for evidence](#) launched last year following a recent increase in the number of incidents involving lasers, the government today (8 January 2018) pledged additional support to local authority ports and borders teams to stop high-powered laser pointers entering the UK.

This includes supporting local authority teams to carry out increased checks at the border, including testing products to ensure they are safe. The support will also ensure local authority teams have access to the necessary scientific, technical and testing expertise.

The government will work with manufacturers and retailers to improve laser pointer labelling, indicating that they must not be pointed at eyes or at vehicles and must state the power level of the product. The policing of online laser pointer sales will also be improved by working with online retailers including eBay.

More than 150 incidents of eye injuries involving laser pointers were reported since 2013, the vast majority of these involving children. As in many of these cases neither children nor their parents have known the danger involved, the government will also work to raise awareness of the risks associated with laser pointers.

In 2016, the Civil Aviation Authority received reports of 1,258 laser incidents, with Heathrow the most frequent location for reports of the devices being used recklessly.

Laser beam attacks against the rail network are also a concern. Records from the British Transport Police show that between 1 April 2011 and 30 November 2017, a total of 578 laser incidents were recorded. This equates to approximately 96 incidents per year.

Margot James, Consumer Minister, said:

The government has listened to concerns from pilots, health professionals and safety experts, which is why we are going further than ever before to crack down on the sale of unsafe devices.

Public safety is of the utmost importance and we are working to increase the public's knowledge of the potential dangers associated with these devices and strengthening the penalties for when they are misused.

Professor John O'Hagan, of PHE's Laser and Optical Radiation Dosimetry Group, said:

Over time we have become increasingly concerned about the dangers of growing numbers of unlabelled and incorrectly labelled high power laser pointers being bought by the public.

It is tragic that we continue to see eye injuries, especially in children. Laser safety experts at Public Health England have worked closely with local authorities in stopping large numbers of these lasers reaching UK consumers.

The extra protections proposed should help even further – if you have a laser and you don't need it, remove the batteries and get rid of it.

Brian Strutton, General Secretary of the British Airline Pilots Association (BALPA), said:

This is more welcome news from the government on lasers and shows that it is taking this important issue seriously.

The Department for Transport recently [announced the introduction of new tougher laws](#) for those who shine lasers at aircraft. Now the tougher restrictions on importation should hopefully stop high-powered lasers reaching the hands of those with ill-intentions in the first place.

Shining a laser at an aircraft is extremely dangerous and has the potential to cause a crash that could be fatal to not only those on board, but people on the ground too.

Today's measures build on tough new penalties in the [Laser Misuse \(Vehicles\) Bill](#), which was introduced by the Department for Transport last year. The Bill expands the list of vehicles it is an offence to target with lasers. It also makes it easier to prosecute offenders by removing the need to prove an intention to endanger a vehicle. People who shine laser devices at transport operators could be jailed for up to 5 years.

1. Rehman Chishti MP introduced a private members bill to Parliament to control dangerous laser pens and this was followed by the government's call for evidence to address the inappropriate use of these devices.
2. The Laser Misuse (Vehicles) Bill introduced by the Department for Transport, which has its second reading on Tuesday 9 January, will expand the list of vehicles, beyond just planes, which it is an offence to target with lasers.

3. The increased investment for local authority ports and border teams will support increased checks at the border, including the testing of products to ensure they are safe, and great enforcement action. BEIS will also ensure local authority teams have access to the necessary scientific, technical and testing expertise.