

News story: New strategy launched to keep consumers safe and protect businesses that do the right thing

- Plan forms part of the government's modern Industrial Strategy, building confidence in the system delivering the highest level of protection for consumers and helping British businesses to thrive
- Strategy will also help protect responsible businesses from unfair competition posed by unsafe products

Plans to strengthen the UK's world-leading product safety regime have been set out today (10 August 2018) by the government's newly established Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS).

The OPSS was established in January to help keep consumers safe and enforce the UK's strict safety laws and the strategy and delivery plan launched today sets out a bold programme of action to enhance the UK's ability to identify risks, protect consumers and co-ordinate large scale product recalls and repairs.

Included in the plan are ambitious new measures such as:

- a new national incident management team for product safety incidents capable of coordinating large scale product recall and repair programmes
- establishing a new website to support consumers with reliable information and advice about recalled products
- increased support for local authority enforcement teams at ports, borders and points of entry to ensure the safety of goods that are entering the UK
- close working with manufacturers to ensure they are compliant with safety regulations from an earlier stage of the production process
- developing tools and guidance to assist local authorities in improving risk assessments, identifying mistakes before they happen

Consumer Minister Kelly Tolhurst said:

Our top priority is keeping the British public safe and we established the Office for Product Safety and Standards in January to play an enhanced role in strengthening our tough and well-respected product safety regime.

Today's strategy will fulfil that promise, allowing consumers to buy products with confidence, secure in the knowledge there is a robust and effective system in place to keep people safe and hold companies accountable.

It will also ensure that the vast majority of businesses that do the right thing and comply with the law are protected from the unfair competition presented by companies that bypass the rules and sell unsafe products.

Chair of the Working Group on Product Recalls and Safety, Neil Gibbins, said:

I am pleased to see this strategy is designed to lead to the implementation of one of the key steps identified by the group. National capacity to support our locally based trading standards officers is warmly welcomed.

Today's strategy forms a key part of the government's modern Industrial Strategy, delivering on its commitment to provide consumers with the highest levels of protection while ensuring the UK has a business environment that protects businesses that do the right thing.

The delivery plan 2020, published alongside the strategy, also sets out a number of additional commitments for the OPSS including:

- working with white goods manufacturers, gaining assurance that their compliance systems are robust and that they are implementing the Product Recalls Code of Practice
- publishing a Strategic Research Programme, setting out priorities for scientific research into potential product safety risks
- preparing the first national Strategic Assessment to prioritise product safety actions, based on scientific evidence
- working with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) and public health bodies to further improve injury data collection
- working with the government's Behavioural Insights Unit to understand how to most effectively reach consumers in product recall scenarios and with wider product safety messages
- encouraging greater diversity in standards committee membership
- supporting consumer awareness campaigns about specific hazards

Since its formation in January, the OPSS has been working closely with regulatory bodies such as National Trading Standards, other government departments and manufacturers to upgrade the product safety system.

This has included publishing the world's first Code of Practice for Product Safety Recall which sets out how businesses should recall products, work with manufacturers and retailers to improve labelling and raise consumer awareness of the risks of laser pointers, and beginning work, ahead of EU exit, with Trading Standards at key border checkpoints to strengthen our ability to stop unsafe products at the border.

Backed up by a clear delivery plan to 2020, the strategy sets out how Safety and Standards will:

- analyse: strengthening analysis to support effective decision making,

- making the best use of scientific evidence, risk and intelligence
- inform: providing information to support consumers in making informed choices and ensuring that businesses have the information they need to be responsible and comply with the law
 - enforce: delivering responsive, effective and targeted enforcement to maintain protection, fairness and confidence
 - build: creating a robust product safety system infrastructure that supports innovation and ensures the UK system is fit for the future

Office of Product Safety and Standards

The government created the Office of Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) on 21 January 2018 to identify consumer risks and manage responses to large-scale product recalls and repairs, 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.

Alongside the product safety strategy and delivery plan, the government will today publish an incident management plan, a strategic research plan and a summary of key achievements by the OPSS since its launch in January.

The strategy does not lessen any of the legal responsibilities of manufacturers, importers and retailers to present safe products to the market, and to take rapid effective action when safety issues arise with their products.

There are no changes to the roles and responsibilities of local authorities or other market surveillance authorities. The office will provide a number of specialist services centrally to support consistent national enforcement, including aspects of product testing and technical expertise.