

Newsletter from PROSAFE

Joint Action 2015 - Europe co-operates to protect consumers

The Joint Market Surveillance Action 2015 has held its final conference in Brussels from 17 to 18 April 2018. It demonstrated the considerable results that had been achieved by the participating Member State Market Surveillance Authorities in the Action.

Over the past two years, European product safety authorities have been co-operating in Joint Action 2015 to identify and resolve issues with unsafe products found on the European Economic Area market. The Action was co-funded by the European Union (EU) in the framework of the 'Programme of Community Action in the field of Consumer Policy (2014-2020)'.

During the Action, the participating authorities investigated a number of plasticised toys, soothers and soother holders, playgrounds, small electrical household appliances (blenders, mixers and toasters) and handheld circular saws. The investigations followed a risk-based approach, meaning that the market surveillance officials made an effort to target those products that were most likely to fail when examined and tested. This approach ensures that the authorities make the best possible use of the limited resources they have, but it also means that the results cannot be taken as being representative for the situation on the market.

As a result of the Joint Action, almost 700 soothers, soother holders, toys, electrical appliances and power tools were checked. These products were sampled from physical shops as well as e-traders. The Action resulted in the submission of more than 100 notifications in the Rapid Alert System for dangerous non-food products (RAPEX¹) of the European Commission. In this database, consumers can find up-to-date information about the measures taken against dangerous products found on the market. In addition, more than 1.000 pieces of playground equipment in use and more than 357 playgrounds were inspected.

Some of the specific results include:

- **Soothers and soother holders**

The participants had tested almost 200 soothers and soother holders at an accredited laboratory. On top of this, the market surveillance inspectors checked many more products in the shops as part of the sampling process when they look for seemingly dangerous products to be further sent for laboratory tests.

The test results showed that around 20% of the tested soother holders and 4% of the tested soothers presented a serious risk to the consumers. As a consequence, the Market Surveillance Authorities (MSAs) have decided to remove it from the market. Around 25% of the soother holders and 50% of the soothers passed the tests without remarks.

Besides removing a number of unsafe products from the market, this Activity also established a very good and fruitful liaison with the standardisation committee responsible for the standards of soothers and soother holders. The Activity fed its experiences into this standardisation work, which in the long run will lead to improved standards and safer products for consumers.

As a consumer, you should look out for soother holders with small parts that are not sufficiently attached or soother holders longer than 220 mm. Also check the RAPEX overview at the European Commission's website for unsafe products^{Føjl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.}

- **Plasticised toys**

This Activity focussed on risks associated with chemicals in plasticised toys, which could be very dangerous to children, if the maximum limit of the chemicals used was exceeded. These included chemicals such as phthalates, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH's), bisphenol A and other substances of concern. The focus was on products such as plastic dolls, inflatable plastic toys, plastic toy books, bath toys and squeezable toys.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/consumers_safety/safety_products/rapex/alerts/main/index.cfm?event=main.listNotifications.

The participants sampled 255 toys that were sent for chemical analysis to an accredited European laboratory. Approximately 23% of the toys contained chemical substances in amounts exceeding the limit values in the legislation. As a result, these toys have been removed from the market.

- **Playgrounds**

In this Activity, the participants inspected 188 items of equipment installed in indoor playgrounds and 828 items of equipment installed at outdoor playgrounds.

The results show that 93% of the indoor equipment items and 75% of the outdoor equipment items had non-compliances. The vast majority of the non-compliances relating to indoor equipment concerned the lack of markings, warnings and instructions. A significant proportion of the non-compliances concerning outdoor equipment were related to technical issues, in many cases resulting from inadequate maintenance. Overall, 43% of the indoor equipment and 56% of the outdoor equipment suffered from technical non-compliances.

Unsafe playgrounds and playground equipment cause approximately between 100.000 and 150.000 accidents each year in the EU. A large share of these is considered to be due to poor maintenance and/or inadequate surfacing.

The authorities advise owners of playgrounds to ensure that they are properly maintained and inspected on a regular basis by the operator of the playground. They also have to be checked by a properly qualified inspector for any dangerous shortcomings on an annual basis.

- **Handheld circular saws**

This Activity checked handheld circular saws intended either for consumer or professional use and rented or sold to consumers in do-it-yourself shops. The participants sampled 100 circular saws from shops and online retailers.

The overall situation was found to be reasonably good taking into consideration that the inspectors had focussed their sampling on products that seemed likely to fail a test. Approximately half of the products passed the investigations. The other half (24) which failed had different kinds of administrative shortcomings (errors in the declaration of conformity, missing safety warnings in the instruction manual or incomplete marking on the saw). Only eight of the tested samples had non-compliances that presented a serious or high risk to the consumer.

Another outcome of this Activity was the development of a guideline that the Market Surveillance Authorities could use in future activities when they assess the risk posed by missing warnings and safety related information.

- **Small electric household appliances (blenders, mixers and toasters)**

The participants sampled and tested 134 appliances from the market - approximately half of them from online stores. Again, the focussed sampling was applied with great success and the great majority of the sampled products failed the tests performed by the laboratories. The numbers are presented below:

- 95% of the blenders
- 87% of the mixers
- 58% of the toasters

Some 80% of the blenders and mixers had errors in the marking and instructions, and in total 40% of the 134 products were withdrawn from the market as a result of these investigations.

This activity also examined testing for three safety issues that are not addressed by the current version of the standards: measurement of the cutting blade stopping time for blenders, testing whether it is possible to access the rotating knife in a blender and measurement of the surface temperatures on non-functional surfaces of toasters. The experiences were fed back into the standardisation committee for further consideration and possible improvement of the standards.

Caution!

The above results are based on samples of products from the markets in the participating countries. As in any routine market surveillance activity, the results represent the targeted efforts that authorities undertake to identify unsafe products. They do not give a statistically valid picture of the situation of the whole market.

Tests were undertaken at accredited laboratories and focussed on those safety requirements that have the largest impact on consumer safety.

Further information about the products mentioned above may be found on the national authority's websites or the RAPEX website^{Fejl! Bogmærke er ikke defineret.}.

The Joint Action also examined ways to improve the impact of the activities and for the first time considered how to better address new and emerging issues in the future.

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Background information

This information is issued by PROSAFE and the 35 participating authorities in the Joint Market Surveillance Action on GPSD Products 2015 - JA2015. The participants come from 26 countries spread over the entire Europe (Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden).

The Action is coordinated by PROSAFE (Product Safety Forum of Europe), a non-profit organisation that works to enhance co-operation between the Market Surveillance Authorities and their officers in order to improve the safety and compliance of products and product related services. Visit www.prosafe.org to learn more about the Joint Action 2015 and other Joint Actions coordinated by PROSAFE.

Disclaimer

This PROSAFE newsletter arises from the Joint Market Surveillance Action on GPSD Products - JA2015, which received funding from the European Union in the framework of the 'Programme of Community Action in the field of Consumer Policy (2014-2020)'.

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