



## Consumer safety

**How CPIN plays a vital role in protecting consumers by minimizing the risk of harm when using products and services.**

### **BSI Consumer & Public Interest Network (CPIN)**

CPIN is an independent network of volunteers trained to represent the UK consumer voice in standards. CPIN focuses its work in five priority areas:

- Consumer safety
- Consumer vulnerability
- Digital
- Services
- Sustainability



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Consumers have a right to safety when using products and services. People often assume that everything they buy is safe, especially if it is from a well-known brand or retailer. In the UK, a strong regulatory framework places responsibility on suppliers to protect consumers from unsafe products and services (see 'Consumer protection'). However, there are increasing challenges to consumer safety (see 'Challenges to safety') and when things go wrong consequences can be devastating - from poor health to serious injury and even death.

Incidents such as the Grenfell Tower fire, Whirlpool tumble dryer recall and exploding Samsung Galaxy Note batteries have highlighted serious safety problems and the need for those involved in consumer protection to act quickly and think creatively to keep up with the pace of change.

Although no product or service can ever be completely risk-free, all reasonable steps should be taken to minimize consumer harm. Consumer participation in standards development is vital to achieving this. The Consumer and Public Interest Network (see 'What is CPIN?'), represents UK

consumers in a wide range of product and service standards, helping to keep them safe by highlighting potential hazards and proposing standards solutions. Keeping consumers safe is CPIN's top priority.

The Norwegian Consumer Council found serious security flaws with internet connected toys, which could allow strangers to listen to, and communicate with, children.



## Challenges to safety

Protecting consumers from harm is a continuing mission. Consumer markets, technologies and business practices are constantly evolving, creating new challenges and risks.

### Changing markets

The rapid expansion of global markets, cross-border trade and e-commerce has lowered prices and increased choice for consumers. But it has also made it easier to access products that may not be safe. Where items have been bought cross-border, especially online, it can be difficult to know who's made them, which regulations or standards have been followed, if items are genuine or of good quality.

### New products

Innovative technologies have led to the creation of completely new products, which have introduced unexpected risks. For example, driverless cars raise many questions about consumer safety, as do 3D printers, which give

people the ability to print replacement parts in materials that may not be fit for purpose, or to print lethal weapons.

### Traditional products

Innovation has led to new methods of manufacturing traditional goods, to make them smaller, lighter, smarter and often cheaper. They might look the same but be constructed differently, creating new risks. For example, many traditional products, such as watches, toys and household appliances are now connected to the internet bringing issues such as privacy and security to the fore (See CPIN's Digital leaflet). Many of these smart products are controlled by separate service providers (e.g. via apps), which can blur lines of responsibility.

### Consumer behaviour

Under the General Product Safety Directive, products must be safe for intended and unintended users, under 'reasonably foreseeable conditions', but this is not always easy to predict. Safety issues can arise when manufacturers don't understand how people might use products in real life. For example, increasingly powerful laser pointers can cause serious damage to eyes. Although not intended to be used in this way, children can easily access them and injuries can occur. Where new products or services gain rapid popularity, safety issues can also be overlooked. For example, trampoline parks, hoverboards and electric scooters have all led to accidents, mainly involving children.



# Consumer protection

In the UK, key sectors, such as electrical appliances, food and toys, are covered by regulations that set safety requirements. In addition, the General Product Safety Regulations (GPSR) 2005 place an obligation on all businesses to ensure that products are safe. If a product is found to be unsafe, businesses could face criminal prosecution, be forced to recall the product, or withdraw it from market.



## Case study: appliance fires

CPIN recently collaborated with the London Fire Brigade, Which? and Electrical Safety First to improve the safety standards for domestic appliances. We were successful in campaigning for design changes to reduce the risk of fire in refrigerating appliances and for product recall systems to be improved.

The Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) performs crucial oversight to ensure regulations are met. Trading Standards (TS) are responsible for day-to-day market surveillance and enforcement.

Charities such as Which?, the Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT) and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) also play a vital role in consumer protection by raising awareness of safety risks and campaigning for improvements. BSI's Consumer and Public Interest Network (see 'What is CPIN?') works closely with organizations such as these to share intelligence and propose standards solutions.

Standards play a vital role in consumer protection, providing detailed test methods and safety requirements which can help organizations comply with the law.

## Consumer involvement in standards

Each year numerous injuries and fatalities are caused by unsafe products and services, many of which could be prevented by better design, appropriate materials, clearer information and effective recalls. Consumer participation in standards, by organizations such as CPIN, ensures that consumer safety is at the top of the agenda and important issues are addressed.


Consumer representatives can explain how real people are using products and services, identify potential hazards and propose new or amended standards content to mitigate specific risks. For example, a requirement that tests are carried out for stability or structural strength, non-toxic materials used, necessary age restrictions applied, or appropriate safety warnings provided.

The graphic below illustrates the value of the consumer voice in standards development.

## Reducing risk of harm


Consumer participation in standards can help to minimize the risk of serious injury or death by putting requirements in place to address specific hazards, such as those below, making a significant contribution to consumer safety.

**Burns**




- ⚠ Children or older people, who may have slower reactions or thinner skin, have been burnt by touching external surfaces of kettles and oven doors.
- ✅ Maximum temperature of external surfaces in domestic appliances (BS EN 60335).

**Choking**




- ⚠ People have choked on pen tops.
- ✅ Pen tops are manufactured with holes in them to allow air to get through if swallowed (BS 7272).

**Entrapment**




- ⚠ Children have injured their fingers in folding pushchairs.
- ✅ Folding parts must not be accessible (BS EN 1888).

**Falling**




- ⚠ Children have been hurt falling from windows.
- ✅ Improving locks on windows (BS EN 13126).

**Poisoning**



- ⚠ People have become ill or died from food poisoning.
- ✅ Setting requirements for food hygiene and safe storage to minimize health risks from unsafe food (BS EN 1186).

**Strangulation**



- ⚠ Children have been strangled by looped cords on window blinds.
- ✅ All blinds must be safe by design, e.g. using easy break devices that come apart under pressure (BS EN 13120).

## Key consumer issues

CPIN's work is guided by the consumer principles. By following these, CPIN reps make sure that nothing vital is missed. Particular consideration is always given to consumers in vulnerable circumstances – such as children, older people and those with disabilities who may be particularly susceptible to harm (see CPIN leaflet on 'Consumer Vulnerability').



### Role of standards

Standards play a vital role in improving the safety of products and services for consumers, by detailing good practice for organizations such as government, regulators, manufacturers, retailers and service providers.

They can encourage organizations to think about consumer safety at all stages of their process - from design to manufacture, to point of sale and market surveillance.

They can also provide guidance on how to respond to products and services identified as unsafe whilst on the market and being used by consumers.

“Reducing the risk of consumer harm is a top priority for every standard.”

### Access

Every individual has different needs and abilities, so it is important that products and services are designed inclusively. However, while improving access for intended users, manufacturers and service providers must also restrict access for unintended users. For example, international standards on child resistant packaging make it difficult for children to access medicines and other products which may be toxic. In the provision of digital services, the age verification standard (PAS 1296) can help to safeguard children.

### Choice

To make informed purchasing decisions consumers need to understand the choices on offer. Clear, accurate and comparable product information and labelling can give consumers confidence to choose products which are suitable and safe. For example, international standards can help parents to select and fit the correct car seat for their child.

### Information

Once purchased, it is vital that consumers understand how to use products and services safely and what NOT to do. Clear safety warnings and instructions are essential. The BS EN 82079 standard spells out requirements for user instructions relevant to a wide range of products. In the provision of services, staff should be adequately trained to communicate risks, for example, safety briefings at trampoline parks. There are also standards for graphical symbols to ensure that signage in public areas, such as beaches and playgrounds, can be understood by everyone.

### Redress

In the event of harm caused by unsafe products or services, consumers have a right to redress. Standards, such as complaints handling, can help organizations to deal with problems effectively, requiring them to spell out who is responsible for dealing with safety incidents, the remedies on offer and what steps consumers should take.

Swift action is needed to prevent other consumers being affected by the same problem. CPIN contributed to a code of practice for Product Recalls (PAS 7100) which provides guidance on the effective management of product safety incidents. Good systems of redress can build consumer confidence and trust.

### Representation

Faults and safety hazards can slip through the net if a broad range of safety implications are not considered at the design stage. If risk assessments and user testing are built into the design stage, products and services are more likely to meet the needs of consumers, avoiding problems later down the line. Groups that represent consumers, such as CPIN, are vital to provide insight into consumer behaviour and ensure real hazards are addressed.

### Safety

Reducing the risk of consumer harm is a top priority for every standard (see 'Reducing harm'). However, sometimes the risks to physical safety aren't obvious. For example, smart devices without adequate security measures - such as mobile phones, fitness trackers and webcams - can allow hackers to spy on people or track their location without their knowledge, with potentially serious consequences. CPIN is working on a new international standard – Privacy by Design of Consumer Goods and Services – to encourage organizations to build in safety and minimize risks at the design stage and throughout the life of the product. For example, when software updates.

### Sustainability

Consumer demand for the newest tech has led to a tendency to replace products rather than repair. In response, many products now have shorter lifespans. Standards can encourage manufacturers to consider how this might impact quality and safety. They can also provide guidance on labelling and logos to communicate how to dispose safely of items such as batteries and electrical appliances.

## What is CPIN?

The Consumer and Public Interest Network (CPIN) is an independent network of volunteers who are trained to represent the voice of UK consumers in standards. CPIN works closely with other consumer organizations, who may also represent the consumer stakeholder, to:

- Ensure that standards address real issues that matter to real people
- Give a voice to all consumers, including children, older people and those with disabilities
- Add value to standards, helping businesses that use them to improve quality, accessibility and safety, thereby enhancing consumer confidence and trust.

CPIN focuses its work in five priority areas, where it believes there is high potential for consumer detriment, and standards can have a positive impact in addressing this harm:

- Consumer safety
- Consumer vulnerability
- Digital
- Services
- Sustainability

CPIN is supported by the British Standards Institute (BSI) and BEIS.

For more information about CPIN's work, or to find out how to get involved, please:

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OR

Visit:  
[www.bsigroup.com/consumers](http://www.bsigroup.com/consumers)

## Further information

### BSI

UK's national standards body. To find out more about standards or to get involved:

[bsigroup.com](http://bsigroup.com)

[@bsi\\_UK](https://twitter.com/bsi_UK)

### ISO COPOLCO

Consumer Policy Committee of the International Organization for Standardization

[iso.org/copolco](http://iso.org/copolco)

[@ISOConsumers](https://twitter.com/ISOConsumers)

### ANEC

European consumer voice in standards

[anec.eu](http://anec.eu)

[@anectweet](https://twitter.com/anectweet)

### Consumers International

A membership organization that brings together 200+ consumer groups worldwide

[consumersinternational.org](http://consumersinternational.org)

[@consumers\\_int](https://twitter.com/consumers_int)

The logo for BSI (British Standards Institution) consists of the lowercase letters 'bsi.' in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The period at the end is a solid black dot.

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