

EuroCommerce welcomes modernisation of product safety rules

Speaking on the launch today of proposed revision of the General Product Safety Directive, EuroCommerce Director-General Christian Verschueren said:

“We wholeheartedly support updating the Product Safety Directive. This is long overdue: since it was first adopted 20 years ago, the market has changed dramatically, in particular due to digitalisation. This has further been accelerated by COVID, and we need rules which can address the many new ways in which products are bought and sold. The influx of products bought online from traders outside the EU which do not meet EU standards is one of these changes which needs effective action”.

Consumer demand is driving innovation in retail, and our sector is responding with a diverse range of digital and omnichannel options to suit individual consumers’ needs and expectations. We need EU policy and regulation to reflect these trends, and retailers need a coherent framework that:

- ensures a high level of consumer trust that the products they buy are safe;
- balances responsibilities for all market players depending on their place in the supply chain, while ensuring their proportionality;
- provides for harmonised and clear risk assessment rules for effective enforcement and recall of dangerous products;
- creates a level playing field for all businesses selling to EU consumers - whether they are established in the EU or outside;
- uses to the full the possibilities of digital technology in alerting the public to risks;
- works hand in hand, and does not overlap with the rules on platform liability under the Digital Services Act.

Retailers and wholesalers depend on consumer trust, and have a direct interest in EU action to ensure that all products on the EU market are safe, and that they are effectively recalled if they are not. In this respect, we welcome greater cooperation between market surveillance and customs authorities, as well as with businesses.

There is a growing problem of non-compliant products entering the EU, which can potentially cause harm to both consumers and put law-abiding businesses at a significant disadvantage. In 2020, some 50% (1126) of alerts for dangerous goods concerned imports originating from China and Hong Kong.

We have noted the proposal introduces a responsible person for all products placed on the Union market, in line with the regulation on market surveillance and compliance of products, which will allow the operator accountable for the product to be contacted more easily. The strengthened traceability rules in the proposal, however, need to be further analysed for their practicality, especially for SMEs.

Verschueren concluded: “The bottom line is that unsafe products should not be on the EU market. If they are found, retailers and wholesalers actively cooperate with authorities to inform manufacturers or importers, and consumers. We, therefore, welcome the proposed action to further increase the efficiency of recalls.”

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EuroCommerce is the principal European organisation representing the retail and wholesale sector. It embraces national associations in 31 countries and 5.4 million companies, both leading global players such as Carrefour, Ikea, Metro and Tesco, and many small businesses. Retail and wholesale provide a link between producers and 500 million European consumers over a billion times a day. It generates 1 in 7 jobs, providing a varied career for 29 million Europeans, many of them young people. It also supports millions of further jobs throughout the supply chain, from small local suppliers to international businesses. EuroCommerce is the recognised European social partner for the retail and wholesale sector.