

WHIRLPOOL TUMBLE DRYERS REVIEW – OPSS RISK STATEMENT

The Product:

Models of vented and condensing tumble dryers manufactured between April 2004 and September 2015 and sold under Hotpoint, Indesit, Creda, Proline and Swan brands.

The Issue:

A risk that clumps of lint (from drying materials) could form within the machine, fall onto the heater, ignite and cause a fire.

The Background:

In 2014, Whirlpool Corporation took over ownership of Indesit. In early 2015, they identified a safety issue with some of their tumble dryer models

In August 2015, Whirlpool informed its Primary Authority, Peterborough City Council, (PCC) of the issue and the technical modification designed to address the problem. PCC assessed the risk of unmodified machines as low under RAPEX guidelines. It was agreed a consumer-facing modification campaign was an appropriate response.

From September 2015, Whirlpool implemented its technical modification programme. Since then, the speed of progress and effectiveness of the programme has been publicly criticised including in the media and through consumer bodies such as Which?

In January 2017 PCC recognised an opportunity to reduce risk further and served a statutory 'Notice to Warn'. This required Whirlpool to give a warning setting out the risk associated with unmodified dryers and including the words "unplug and do not use the tumble dryer before modification or replacement has taken place".

Public criticism and parliamentary interest (including the BEIS Select Committee) has continued. In April 2018, Which? reported it had examined two modified machines which still posed a fire risk. In spring 2018, a series of features appeared on the consumer show BBC Watchdog.

In May 2018, the Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Corporate Responsibility asked the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) to undertake a review of the action taken by Whirlpool.

The Review:

The OPSS review considered two key questions, to form a decision on any appropriate regulatory action:

1. Was Whirlpool's technical modification, designed to reduce the risk of fires arising from its tumble dryers, effective in both *design* and *installation*?
2. Was Whirlpool's consumer outreach programme adequate?

The Risk Assessment:

OPSS assessed the risk for tumble dryers which had been modified in the field or at Whirlpool's Yate factory, using the EU General Risk Assessment Methodology (2015-IMP-MSG-15) and the RAPEX Guidelines.

All affected appliances were considered together, based on modifications made within agreed technical parameters.

The OPSS risk assessment was conducted by experts within the Office, with additional support being provided by external specialists where required.

Responses to risk should always be based on the best possible assessment at that time. OPSS continually reviews additional information and will update its assessment if appropriate.

The Information:

The risk assessment reflects the data for the severity and impact of incidents in the UK.

A total of 98 documents were provided by Whirlpool during the review. In addition, many hundreds of files of a technical nature were provided. Relevant documents were also obtained from PCC.

OPSS purchased and examined 28 used tumble dryers and one new dryer, of varying Whirlpool brands.

The majority of the work has focussed on examining the engineering logic deployed and gathering data. This data driven aspect of the review has considered a number of sources. Material from Which? and BBC Watchdog has been considered as part of this approach.

Throughout the review we have taken a dynamic approach to assessing risks to consumers, continuously reviewing the evidence and data gathered to evaluate whether these change the assessment of risk. The position regarding information to consumers has remained the same.

There is limited data to show the long-term impact of the modification.

The Risk Level:

The RAPEX Risk Assessment Method is the prescribed process for undertaking regulatory risk assessments. It is based on a matrix that considers the severity of harm that can be caused by the hazard (product) against the likelihood of that harm (injury/damage), to identify the level of risk.

The risk assessment found:

For modified Whirlpool tumble dryers in which lint build up facilitates a fire which breaches the appliance and either directly injures someone or through a series of events causes a serious injury or even a fatality, the risk is **LOW**; the probability being too low to identify in the RAPEX framework.

In similar circumstances where such an event occurs, the risk that one or more persons are injured in such a way as hospital treatment is necessary is **LOW**.

In similar circumstances where such an event occurs, the risk that there is property damage to one room/section/flat of a property is **LOW**.

The Conclusions:

Main findings:

- The modification has reduced risk associated with lint fires.
- The level of risk of lint fires for modified appliances is low.
- Additional steps are required to monitor the level of risk throughout the lifetime of the appliances, and beyond.
- Enforcement action is not appropriate at this time.

Despite a low risk assessment and the history of previous outcomes, each fire which breaches an appliance has the potential to cause a serious injury or fatality. This requires continued vigilance and review by Whirlpool, OPSS, local authorities and consumers.

Regulation 7 of the GPSR places an ongoing responsibility on Whirlpool to monitor and manage risk. OPSS has placed requirements on the company in relation to these responsibilities. If these requirements are not met within an agreed timescale then OPSS will consider the need for enforcement action. The Notice to Warn for unmodified machines, issued in January 2017 by PCC, is ongoing.

ENDS