



Office for Product
Safety & Standards

Historical Product Recall Case Study

Research

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1. Executive Summary

Background

In February 2016, the Lynn Faulds Wood Review¹ set out the limitations of the product recall system in the UK, with all stakeholders involved agreeing that the present system is inadequate. Following this, in 2018 the Office for Product and Safety Standards (OPSS) was established, and the PAS 7100 guidelines were published to strengthen and enhance the UK's product safety regime and recall process.

To support and improve the PAS 7100 guidelines and product recall processes, OPSS wanted to identify best practice and industry learnings from real recall examples. OPSS therefore commissioned Kantar to examine past recall cases in a range of sectors to create a detailed, analytical description of the material, organisational and personal factors that impact their effectiveness. The aim was to provide evidence of the factors that support and hinder product recall processes and identify cross-sector learnings to inform policy interventions that will improve the effectiveness of recalls in the future.

Methodology

To address the objectives, the research took a multi-stage qualitative approach consisting of fifteen stakeholder interviews, consumer research with an online community of 24 participants and case studies involving interviews with up to five actors. The primary stage of the research involved in-depth historical product recall case studies being conducted across different sectors to explore in detail the processes implemented, and actors involved, to identify the factors that drive and hinder recall effectiveness. To select 'effective' recall cases to review, a scoping stage was conducted with stakeholders. This was also used to develop an understanding of the current product recall system and its perceived limitations. Research with consumers was designed to provide their view on the case studies, given that interviews with those affected was not feasible. The opportunity was taken to additionally explore consumer views more widely.

Key Findings

The following sections outline the key findings from each stage of the research, concluding with learnings and recommendations to improve the recall and corrective action process.

Stakeholder Perspective

Interviews were held with 15 stakeholders from across a variety of organisations, such as trading standards, trade associations and consumer bodies. Whilst stakeholders felt the PAS 7100 guidelines indicate positive progress and have contributed to greater awareness and importance placed on recall processes, they identified several limitations of the current system that were perceived to hinder recall effectiveness. Namely, the voluntary and subjective nature of the system, a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities, the

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consumer-product-recall-review>

guideline's lack of specificity, and there being no definition of success or root-cause analysis protocol.

Stakeholders also highlighted specific stages of the recall process as being particularly challenging to execute and a barrier to higher recall rates. Product traceability and engaging consumers were considered the most problematic stages, with variations in risk assessments and the logging and sharing of issues also reported as an issue.

Suggestions to improve the recall system included greater enforcement of the PAS 7100 guidelines, greater responsibility placed on other actors (beyond manufacturers) involved in recalls and introducing broad parameters to measure recall success. Reflecting the aim of this research, stakeholders also voiced a need for more industry knowledge sharing around 'best practice' to provide tangible guidance and inspiration on how to implement an effective recall process and overcome the common challenges discussed.

Consumer Perspective

Recall awareness and engagement was generally low amongst consumers. They expected products sold in the UK to be safe and did not actively engage with product safety recalls. In the event of a recall, consumers expected to be clearly notified and provided with enough information to enable a personal risk assessment to be made. The likelihood of consumers responding to recalls was dependent on product category, method of notification and individual experience. The main barriers to action were a difficult or time-consuming process, low perceived risk, and low product value. The main motivations for acting were regular use of a product, high perceived level of risk and a clear and easy recall process.

Case Study: Small Electrical Items

This recall took place in 2017 and involved a small electrical item that was identified as a fire risk. Steps taken during the recall process achieved a 95% return rate. This case study demonstrated the success of implementing an innovative, multi-channel communication campaign involving paid-for social media adverts and emailing all customers, with or without their prior consent, to overcome traceability issues. It also highlighted the benefits of the retailer having a proactive, safety-first ethos, established recall processes and trusted relationships with Trading Standards and their Board Members. Finally, it indicates there is a need for more clarity around product safety versus data protection regulations and guidance on ways to systematically measure the effectiveness of different communication strategies.

Case Study: Large Domestic Appliances

This case study involved a large electronics retailer carrying out corrective action on one of their own-brand tumble dryers that had been identified as a fire risk, which eventually achieved a success rate of around 98%. This case demonstrated the power of retailers collecting customer contact information at point of sale (POS) for increasing traceability, as well as the importance of a multi-channel strategy for prompting customer engagement following contact. It also highlighted some of the potential benefits and challenges of using customer payment data and working with banks to contact customers who cannot be reached by other channels, suggesting that further work from government is needed in this area to explore issues around feasibility and responsibility.

Case Study: Automotive

This case study involved a large manufacturer carrying out corrective action on a HGV Truck with a faulty part that had been identified as a severe risk, that eventually achieved over a 99% success rate. This case study demonstrated the success of trialling innovative transparent communication and multi-modal contact to maximise consumer engagement. It also highlighted the benefits of streamlining corrective action recall processes for product owners and the importance of effective communication and collaboration across actors. A supplementary case study involving a high-end vehicle corrective action highlights the benefits of incentivising consumers and maximising convenience of repair processes. These studies highlight the limitations of postal communications and over-reliance on consumer engagement.

Case Study: Food

This case study involved a small food manufacturer carrying out a recall for the first time due to a product mislabelled as not containing milk, which caused an allergic reaction in a customer with a milk allergy. Steps taken resulted in supermarkets being notified within a few hours and the root cause of the problem being resolved, with the issue not occurring since. This case study demonstrated the benefits of having thorough and rehearsed recall procedures in place and of carrying out root-cause analysis to determine the source and extent of an issue, particularly when dealing with complex supply chains. It also highlights the importance of collaboration and communication across manufacturers and supermarkets in achieving timely and effective outcomes, and the challenges involved in this process.

Case Study: Online Marketplaces

Online marketplaces present a relatively new and rapidly expanding sector. The unique placement of marketplaces in the product safety system raises questions over roles and responsibilities. Consumers expected online marketplaces to supply products of the same quality and safety as traditional retailers. Online marketplaces proactively attempt to block unsafe listings appearing on sites and actively remove products once notified of product safety issues. Some consumer and regulatory bodies believed marketplaces should go further and take on more responsibility for contacting buyers and encouraging recall engagement.

Learnings & Future Considerations

The case studies reviewed revealed several cross-category learnings, demonstrating the key drivers of recall success and highlighting ongoing tensions that need to be addressed to improve recall rates. The most influential drivers of recall effectiveness were:

- Businesses having a proactive, safety-first attitude
- Access to POS information for product and consumer traceability
- Implementing an innovative, multi-channel communication campaign
- Collaboration with other actors
- Conducting practice-drills and root-cause analysis

- Leveraging digital solutions

Ongoing tensions, which continued to be a barrier to recall effectiveness, include:

- A lack of clarity around roles and accountability beyond the manufacture
- Not knowing how to interpret the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in relation to product safety issues
- Difficulties executing key recall stages; product traceability, reaching and influencing consumers, measuring the effectiveness of recall measures and defining success
- Multiple variables influencing recall challenges, potential measures and effectiveness, such as the age and value of a product.

Research learnings suggest the following guidance could help to improve the effectiveness of the product recall and corrective action process in the future and would be worth considering integrating into any revision of PAS 7100 guidance:

- Clarify the **roles and responsibilities** of OPSS, banks, online marketplaces and consumers
- Promote the **brand benefits** of businesses acting responsibly (and consequences of not doing so)
- Provide guidance on the **use and retention of customers data** for product safety
- Encourage **multi-channel recall measures and collaboration** across actors
- Encourage **systematic experimentation** to provide more guidance on effective communication
- Encourage and support smaller businesses in running **product recall practice-drills**
- Provide parameters or examples to help **define success**
- Establish **root-cause analysis** as a formal stage of the product recall process
- Increase awareness of **best practice recall cases** and provide **guidance tailored to different contexts** (e.g. product type, age, severity of risk, consumer profile, size of organisation)

2. Introduction

2.1 Background and context

In February 2016, UK Consumer Product Recall Review, an independent review conducted by Lynn Faulds Wood² set out the limitations of the product recall system in the UK. All stakeholders involved in the review agreed that the present system is inadequate.

Following this review, the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) was created in January 2018 to deliver consumer protection and to support business confidence, productivity and growth. OPSS (part of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)) regulates a wide range of consumer products with a focus on their safety and integrity. It works with local, national and international regulators, with consumer representatives and with businesses to deliver effective protections and to support compliance.

Soon after being established, OPSS teamed up with the British Standards Institution (BSI), the UK's National Standards Body, to launch the first government-backed Code of Practice (PAS 7100) for product safety recall in the UK³. The Code of Practice includes details on how a business can monitor the safety of products and plan for a recall, and how Market Surveillance Authorities such as local authority Trading Standards can support businesses in their monitoring of incidents and their implementation of corrective action.

To support and improve the PAS 7100 guidelines and product recall processes, OPSS wanted to identify best practice and industry learnings from real recall examples.

2.2 Research aims

OPSS commissioned Kantar (Public Division) to conduct historical case study research to identify the key factors influencing product recall effectiveness and inform guidance to improve future recalls. Specifically, the research sought to:

- Examine past recalls in a range of sectors to create a detailed, analytical description of the material, organisational and personal factors that impact their effectiveness;
- Provide evidence of the factors that support and hinder product recall processes in order to inform policy interventions that will improve the effectiveness of recalls in the future; and
- Draw conclusions about what success looks like, what drives it and identify lessons that can be learned across sectors

2.3 Methodology and sampling

To address the objectives, the research took a multi-stage qualitative approach consisting of case studies, stakeholder interviews and consumer research. The primary stage of the

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consumer-product-recall-review>

³ <https://www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/pas7100supporting-better-product-recalls/>

research involved in-depth historical product recall case studies being conducted across different sectors to explore in detail the processes implemented, and actors involved, to identify the factors that drive and hinder recall effectiveness. Some sectors were included in this research despite being outside of OPSS' remit (for example, the automotive and food sector), as the scoping stage suggested useful learnings could be gained from effective recalls in these sectors. To select 'effective' recall cases to review, a scoping stage was conducted with stakeholders. This was also used to develop an understanding of the current product recall system and its perceived limitations. Research with consumers was designed to provide their view on the case studies, given that interviews with those affected was not feasible. It was also used to explore consumer views more widely.

2.3.1 Stakeholder Interviews

We first conducted interviews with 15 stakeholders with product recall expertise, who worked across several sectors and organisations (for example, stakeholders from trade associations for electrical items, toys and food, trading standards and consumer bodies). The main aim of this stage was to identify potential recall case studies to review on the basis of those suggested being viewed as relatively effective within their category.

Stakeholders suggested several potential recalls within the relevant category. Notably, the effectiveness of a recall case recommended by stakeholders relied on their perceptions (rather than being quantified) and was based on multiple factors that were felt to indicate signs of effectiveness, such as the speed of response, number of recall measures implemented, innovative thinking and recall rate. Short introductory calls were conducted with each available recall lead to determine the final case studies based on feasibility and strength of potential learnings.

Secondary aims were to explore and understand:

- A range of broad views of the product recall 'system'
- The extent PAS 7100 has been taken up and applied and the effectiveness of this
- Initial thoughts on how guidance and its implementation could be improved

2.3.2 Deep dive case studies

The main stage of the research consisted of conducting detailed 360-degree reviews of three product recall events that had been relatively successful within their sector:

- *Small electrical appliance*
- *Large domestic appliance*
- *Automotive*

For each case study, we interviewed four to six of the key actors involved in the recall case, including a mix of internal stakeholders from the main business (e.g. the manufacturer or retailer leading the product recall) and external stakeholders providing support during the recall process (e.g. Trading Standards). This research primarily consisted of one-hour in-depth interviews with each actor involved, although in some instances 90-minute mini-groups with two to three actors were conducted.

The aim of this stage was to:

- Develop a detailed understanding of the actions, relationships and influences that contributed to the successful product recall outcome
- Identify learnings that can be applied within the specific sector and universally

Alongside the three main case studies, we also conducted two smaller case studies:

- *Online marketplaces*: A deep-dive review of the recall processes implemented by online marketplaces, based on the growth in online retailers and product recall challenges raised by stakeholders around second-hand and third-party product sold through these platforms. We conducted interviews with Amazon, Ebay and Which?
- *Food*: We were not able to secure sufficient participation from stakeholders to conduct a 360-degree case study review within this sector but present the findings from an interview with the main actor within a small food manufacturer who led a successful recall case. Findings from this case have been supplemented by interviews with supermarket retailers. This has been included to identify cross-sector learnings from the food category and to share the recall process and learnings from a smaller business, as recommended by stakeholders during the stakeholder interviews.

2.3.3 Consumer online community

The third element of the research involved conducting a one-week, qualitative online community with 24 consumers with experience of product recalls. The consumer research was conducted as a separate, complimentary strand as it was not feasible to recruit consumers involved in the specific case studies identified. An online methodology was used as COVID-19 restrictions at the time of the research prevented in-person interviews.

The primary aim of this stage was to:

- Understand consumer perspectives towards the recall measures implemented by businesses during the historical recall case studies being evaluated

The online community was also used as an opportunity to explore consumers views more widely, with the secondary aims being to:

- Explore consumer understanding and expectations of the product recall system;
- Understand consumer experiences of product recalls and explore drivers and barriers to taking action;
- Explore perceptions and experiences across product categories; and
- Understand what messaging and channels consumers would prefer to see around product recalls and what aspects would encourage them to take action

3. Stakeholder Perspective

This section reports on the findings from the stakeholder interviews, including perceptions of the PAS 7100 guidelines, perceived limitations of the current recall system and suggested opportunities to improve recall effectiveness. It highlights that whilst stakeholders felt the PAS 7100 guidelines indicate positive progress and have contributed to greater awareness and importance placed on product recall processes, they identified several factors hindering the effectiveness of the current system - namely its voluntary and subjective nature, a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities, the guideline's lack of specificity, and there being no definition of success or root-cause analysis protocol. Stakeholders also highlighted traceability, consumer engagement and – to a lesser extent – variations in risk assessment and the logging/sharing of issues as particularly challenging barriers to high recall rates.

Suggestions to improve the recall system included greater enforcement to ensure businesses were following the PAS 7100 guidelines, increasing responsibility on other actors involved in recalls and introducing broad parameters to measure recall success. Stakeholders also voiced a need for more industry knowledge sharing around 'best practice' as tangible guidance and inspiration for how to implement an effective recall and overcome the common challenges discussed (detailed examples of best practice are examined in Sections 4-7).

3.1 Perceptions and impact of the PAS 7100 guidelines

Stakeholders felt that the importance of **product safety and recalls had gained salience in recent years**. This development was attributed to high profile product safety incidents and recall cases that had been salient in the media, such as The Grenfell tragedy and Whirlpool, alongside the establishment of OPSS and creation of the PAS 7100 guidelines.

"People want to be on the front foot, nobody wants to be the next Whirlpool" Trading Standards

Stakeholders were generally positive about the **PAS 7100 guidelines, which were described as an 'industry bible'**. As well as outlining the legal requirements businesses/manufacturers must follow if a product safety issue arises, PAS 7100 was seen to provide the most comprehensive guidance to date (and internationally) on how businesses should organise activity in response to a product safety issue.

It was felt that the publication had been **useful in raising awareness of the importance of product safety and the need for businesses to have a recall system in place**. The guidelines were believed to have the greatest potential to benefit smaller businesses, who are less likely to have an established product safety team or recall process in place. In relation to larger organisations, PAS 7100 was felt to outline the processes that they most likely already have in place but was still seen to be useful as a reference.

Stakeholders had difficulty assessing the impact of the guidelines on businesses so far. It was generally felt that awareness and uptake was mixed, with businesses not necessarily having a plan in place or following what is expected. Again, this was seen to

divide along the lines of larger and smaller businesses, with **smaller businesses without a dedicated product safety team being less likely to be aware of the PAS 7100 in order to have engaged**. Trading Standards were reported to be making an effort to ensure smaller businesses/local traders are aware of PAS 7100 and how to use it but were felt to be limited to a large extent by resource. It was therefore suggested that greater resource for Trading Standards could help to improve awareness and uptake.

“The challenge is embedding [the PAS] within organisations. It’s not just ticking the box, it’s a sustained effort to embed that into industry” Charity

In terms of its impact, some stakeholders representing industry groups felt that they had noticed an increased proactivity around product safety among their members since the introduction of the PAS. Trading Standards also mentioned that they had found the guidelines **useful as a tool for guiding conversations with businesses**, providing a systematic and shared framework for discussion. In some instances, trading associations and retailers have also made membership or supplier partnerships contingent on compliance with the PAS guidelines.

3.2 Limitations of the recall system

Despite the PAS 7100 guidelines signalling positive progress, the current recall system was felt to have several limitations hindering effectiveness. The most prevalent limitations were namely the systems voluntary and subjective nature, a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities, a lack of specificity, and there being no definition of success or root-cause analysis protocol.

3.2.1 Voluntary and subjective

Beyond the initial mandatory notification of a product safety issue, the current recall system was seen as largely voluntary and subjective. Whilst the PAS 7100 provides general guidelines for recommended practice, **following notification there was understood to be no statutory procedure or enforcement**. Linked to this issue, stakeholders perceived there to be limited understanding within the industry of what ‘good’ looks like for each recall stage. Concerns were also raised that cuts to Trading Standards funding had led to limited resource for increasing awareness of the PAS 7100 guidelines, guiding businesses through the recall process and enforcing appropriate action.

“Best practice is percolating through, but businesses are not necessarily doing what is required of them yet” Trading Standards

“In the UK it’s still a voluntary system, there are no conversations about best practice and no consequences for not doing a great job” Charity (Electrical Sector)

Recall effectiveness was therefore seen as **largely reliant on businesses acting responsibly**, with stakeholders noting significant variation in effort and execution. Standards were said to vary in terms of how rigorously manufacturers assess risk and the level of effort made by them and other actors to implement an effective recall (e.g. the extent to which retailers and banks choose to cooperate). They also reported that businesses can be resistant to investing time and money into preparing a clear recall process for an eventuality that rarely takes place.

Smaller companies were considered particularly problematic as they were expected to be less aware of their responsibilities if a product issue occurs, may not have any

individual taking responsibility for product safety and are likely to have limited resource to carry out a product recall. Additionally, due to the cost involved in implementing a recall, which could effectively bankrupt smaller businesses, and lower reputational risk, smaller brands were expected to place less emphasis on effective action compared to better resourced large brands and retailers who place a high premium on their reputation. It may therefore be beneficial to increase awareness among small businesses of the financial risks of having to conduct a product recall and consequently, the importance of having effective product safety processes in place to minimise the likelihood of this eventuality.

Stakeholders also reported the **growth of online marketplaces as raising new challenges**. Overall, they felt that there was less oversight or regulation of online marketplaces in relation to product safety and recalls compared to other channels. This was seen as an issue for a number of reasons. Second-hand products, which are harder to trace, are often sold online. Many products sold via online marketplaces are also supplied by third-party traders run by individuals or small teams with limited awareness of their responsibility or resources dedicated to product safety. They may also be based outside of the UK, which carries additional challenges, with non-UK sellers said to be particularly difficult to regulate.

“The focus should not be on the major players, who are already largely taking a responsible approach, but on the wild west of online marketplaces where there is an accident waiting to happen” Toy Sector Industry Body

3.2.2 Roles and responsibilities

Across stakeholders, there was widespread agreement that **manufacturers hold the primary responsibility** for ensuring that a product is safe and corrective action is carried out effectively. However, beyond manufacturers, there was felt to be a **lack of clarity around the responsibilities of other actors** during a recall process, with their involvement seen as more discretionary.

Retailers, for example, were seen to play a crucial role in identifying potential issues and executing an effective recall response. In some instances they were even reported as having placed pressure on a resistant manufacturer to conduct a full recall. However, although retailers were often keen to address product safety issues involving their customers for reputational and quality reasons, their involvement was not seen as mandatory.

Stakeholders consistently felt **more responsibility should also be placed on other actors to improve recall effectiveness**, particularly banks, insurance companies, fire services and online marketplaces. Some additionally voiced the need for greater clarity from OPSS around its role in the recall process, particularly in clarifying responsibilities and helping to power enforcement.

“Businesses do generally understand legislation – but there is lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities for other businesses involved” Food Industry Body

3.2.3 Measuring success

Stakeholders did not feel that there is currently any definition of success or criteria to measure recall effectiveness, which was identified as another limitation of the current system. Most stakeholders acknowledged that it would be difficult to set benchmarks due to the number of variables involved in influencing the success of a product recall.

However, **the lack of guidelines around measurement was felt to undermine the perceived importance or incentive to implement an effective recall process.**

3.2.4 Root-cause analysis

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) highlighted that **businesses involved in a food recall are encouraged to conduct 'root-cause analysis'** as part of their response to ensure that a similar product safety issue is avoided in future. They encourage this analysis to be shared with FSA to enable the identification of broader patterns to inform wider action. This was not thought to be a formal part of the recall process for other categories but was seen as a potentially **valuable route for proactively eliminating product safety risks.**

3.2.5 One system does not fit all

The **PAS 7100 guidelines were felt to be quite general.** Positively this was seen to make them **useful across a range of sectors**, with stakeholders emphasising the challenge arising from the fact of 'no product recall being the same' given the diversity of variables that can influence recall success (e.g. product age, value, category).

At the same time, **the lack of specificity of the current guidelines was seen as limiting their value and usage.** Stakeholders felt more guidance could be provided around the key considerations and recommended actions based on the variables at play. With this in mind, some suggested the PAS 7100 could be usefully supplemented with additional sector/product specific guidelines that provide relevant and tangible examples of best practice.

"You could have sector specific examples, to be put out by sector rather than be included in the PAS. But even then examples would be difficult as each recall is different" Trade Association

3.3 Recall process challenges

Stakeholders reported specific stages of the recall process as being particularly challenging to execute or acting as particular barriers to recall success. Product traceability and engaging consumers were considered the most problematic recall stages, with some also noting variations in risk assessments and the logging and sharing of issues as problematic.

3.3.1 Logging and sharing of issues

Whilst product safety issues are to some extent logged on shared databases (e.g. RAPEX, RASFF⁴), stakeholders felt that this stage of the process had limitations. Information was said to be **inconsistently updated, lacking in detail and context or spread across several databases**, with mixed awareness and usage of the different available information sources. In addition, complaints were said to typically come from multiple sources making it difficult for stakeholders, such as Trading Standards, to notice patterns and issues. Furthermore, they highlighted a **lack of international databases** facilitating the sharing of issues globally.

⁴ RAPEX: Rapid Exchange of Information System. RASFF: Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed

3.3.2 Risk assessment

Several stakeholders raised concerns about the **subjective nature** of the risk assessment process, questioning the robustness of the process for making decisions about whether a recall or corrective action is required. Overall, there was **felt to be significant variation in the quality of risk assessment processes** being implemented.

Notably, businesses involved in the case studies also reported that **it can be difficult to determine the level of risk and decide on the right choice of action** when product safety issues are not clear-cut. A robust risk assessment was considered crucial for protecting consumer safety and guiding the 'proportionality' of recall measures implemented.

3.3.3 Product traceability

Tracing products after sale was widely considered **the most challenging recall stage**. This was highlighted as being **particularly difficult due to low levels of product registration**. Apart from in certain product categories where registration is required (e.g. motor vehicles) or incentivised (e.g. large domestic goods), product registration was said to be low or non-existent, especially for low value items. This was attributed to a mix of factors including a lack of consumer awareness of the need to register products, the effort required and perceptions that data will be used for marketing purposes.

For products that have not been registered, the **manufacturer may be able to use other sources to trace customers**, for example, customer relationship management (CRM) details from retailers. However, this route relies on retailer involvement, which is not always guaranteed, and **information on these systems can often be patchy** – they may not include everyone who has purchased the product, customers may not have given consent to be contacted and details may be out-of-date. GDPR legislation can be a perceived barrier to retailer's contacting customers in relation to a product safety issue, although even if they do have permission, retailers can be wary of doing so due to the perceived risk of customer complaints and reputational concerns.

Even in categories, such as large domestic appliances, where there is some level of registration, **stakeholders raised the issue of second-hand sales**, in which product safety information is rarely passed on or registration details updated with the manufacturer.

That said, whilst this recall stage continues to be a challenge, stakeholders felt that there were **signs of improvement**. This view stemmed primarily from **the increase in online shopping, which necessitates the sharing of customer contact details** for product delivery purposes. Alongside this, stakeholders also mentioned the increase in **people buying directly from manufacturers** (thereby removing retailers as the middleman), the **use of social media** (as a channel to trace customers) and instances of **cooperation from banks** (to access customer contact details).

Stakeholders also anticipated that product traceability would further improve with the **development of digital solutions**. For example, using block chain technologies, the remote disabling of smart devices and other potential solutions to reduce the responsibility placed on consumers to register products and respond to recalls.

3.3.4 Reaching and influencing consumers

The difficulty of reaching and influencing consumers was **also raised as a prominent challenge, particularly for products with low traceability** and where customers cannot be directly contacted. Stakeholders highlighted that there is uncertainty within the industry on how best to ensure consumers notice and engage with product safety notifications. For example, **questions were raised around which channels result in the greatest exposure, and what messaging is most effective** at prompting consumers to take action.

Stakeholders were also conscious that despite business's best efforts, **consumers will conduct their own risk assessment and may choose to continue using the product.**

3.3 Opportunities for improvement

Overall, given the limitations and challenges identified, stakeholders felt there was a need to implement changes to increase the effectiveness of product recalls. The following were suggested as opportunities to improve the current system:

- **Greater enforcement of PAS guidelines and product safety legislation:** Whilst there was discussion around what level of enforcement is realistic/desirable, all emphasised the need for more policing of the current system, including product safety testing, risk assessments and proactive enforcement by Trading Standards/OPSS to ensure the guidelines are being followed.
- **More education on 'best practice':** Reflecting the aims of this study, there was a call for more knowledge sharing from OPSS and businesses to improve understanding of what 'good' looks like at each recall stage and across different product categories.
- **Measuring success:** Linked to the above, stakeholders suggested there could be broad parameters in place to provide a mix of action and outcome-based measurements to improve the consistency and effectiveness of recall strategies implemented and increase understanding of best practice. For example, outcome-based measurements could include the number of consumers reached, withdrawal of the product from sale, confirming the effectiveness of corrective actions and defining a minimum return rate per product category, accounting for different variables and levels of risk. Action-based measures suggested included speed of manufacturer and retailer response, clarity / comprehensiveness of information provided, number of communication channels used and longevity of communication strategy.
- **Greater responsibility placed on 'other' actors:** Stakeholders felt more obligation should be placed on other actors (beyond manufacturers) to improve the effectiveness of product recalls. Some suggested insurance companies and fire services should share the information they have on faulty products or that banks should share consumer contact details. Although retailers were already felt to play an active part in assisting with recall events, there was also felt to be room for improvement when it comes to their role (e.g., contacting customers who have purchased the product).

- **Greater clarity around the role of OPSS:** As discussed, many suggested that it would be useful for OPSS to clarify its role in the recall process, particularly with regards to enforcement.
- **Tackling ‘problem’ areas:** Stakeholders believed a greater focus should be placed on overcoming the more challenging areas of the product recall system. For example, improving the compliance of small businesses and online marketplaces, identifying the owners of second-hand products and improving the safety of high-risk consumers. For example, one stakeholder suggested it should be mandatory for landlords to register products to protect those in rental properties.
- **Improving consumer registration and response rates:** Suggestions included automatic registration at point of sale (POS), educating consumers on the importance of product registration (differentiating this from product warranty and marketing), greater understanding of consumer behaviour and interventions to improve response rates.
- **International standards and communication:** There was felt to be a need for international product recall standards and measures to ensure that a recall in one country promptly mandates a recall in others to avoid unnecessary risk.
- **Improving logging and sharing of issues:** Some suggested the recall system would benefit from having one central, reliable source of national recall information (combining sector specific recall databases) and for information within this database to be more consistently and accurately updated. Existing central databases for food and medicine were mentioned as high-quality examples of what can be achieved. It was also seen as important to raise consumer awareness of the existence of recall databases.

4. Consumer Perspective

This section outlines the findings from an online community, which explored responses to the specific case study examples included in this report (included in the following sections) as well as more general consumer understandings and experiences of recalls, as well as potential motivations and barriers to engagement with recall notifications.

Consumers generally assumed products on sale in the UK to be safe, and as such showed low awareness of and engagement with product recalls. Recalls were seen to indicate gaps in the safety process, and it was felt that manufacturers could be doing more to communicate safety issues with consumers, utilising more effective channels and clearly indicating any risks to enable consumers to make informed decisions. The likelihood of taking action was dependent on a variety of factors, with action more likely for high value / newer products or for those perceived to pose a severe risk. Consumers were unlikely to physically return a product unless the return process was easy and convenient. Product recalls involving a corrective action were seen as less likely to prompt action, due to the inconvenience of scheduling appointments and reduced levels of trust in the safety of products sold by the manufacturer.

4.1 Consumer perception of recalls

4.1.1 Recall perceptions

Consumers expressed the view that recalls signalled a fault in manufacturer safety processes. Hearing about recalls could therefore reduce trust in a certain brand and, based on this, many consumers expressed a preference for recall and refund over product repair. However, at the same time it was recognised that a well implemented recall suggested that a manufacturer or retailer cared about consumers and was willing to exert effort to correct the issue.

Sector specific perceptions were influenced by personal experience, although some general themes emerged:

Food recalls were seen to occur relatively frequently. Consumers were aware of the FSA and believed that high standards and robust testing processes were in place, resulting in more frequent recalls. Consumers were unlikely to respond to food recalls for several reasons: they were likely to have eaten the product before seeing a notice, issues were often specific to allergens which did not affect them, and would rather throw away products than return them based on their low value. However, mislabelled or contaminated products were felt to be extremely dangerous for those with allergies.

Large domestic appliances were associated with high profile cases in the media which skewed consumer perceptions of severity; although some consumers recognised these might occur less frequently than the media made it appear. These products were likely to be returned due to the higher value, higher perceived risk of harm, and negative impact of faults on daily life. However, the inconvenience of scheduling appointments and being without an appliance for any length of time could deter response.

Cars were also considered to undergo frequent recalls, which required corrective repairs rather than replacement. The high-risk nature of faults, and potential impact on all road users, meant publicity and awareness was high. Consumers who had experienced these recalls had typically acknowledged the notices received but could still deprioritise booking repair appointments due to perceptions of inconvenience.

Toys and baby products were considered high risk categories subject to high safety standards. This was felt to reduce the number of unsafe products making it to sale and subsequently reduced recall frequency. The likelihood of return would depend on product value with low value items being thrown away.

Clothes were not considered a dangerous category. Few had heard of recalls in this sector but considered it normal to return faulty clothes under consumer rights policies.

Cosmetics and toiletries recalls were also seen as rare. Again, consumers expected these products to meet standards before reaching the market.

4.1.2. Effectiveness of the system

Overall consumers felt the product safety system to be **fairly effective** and as such felt safe purchasing products within the UK. They perceived there to be effective processes in place and felt that generally manufacturers were adhering to regulations to the best of their ability. However, some did express the view that **manufacturers should be taking more precautions** to avoid recalls in the first place.

The general **lack of awareness and engagement with recalls**, and the lack of available information around the outcomes of recalls, meant that many found it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the product recall system. In general, the system was considered less effective at the recall notification and implementation stage. Consumers recognised that their low awareness and engagement made it **easy for them to miss information** relating to recalls and felt that companies could be doing more to facilitate their engagement.

They also felt the system was **inconsistent**, with standards and processes differing across product categories and across retailers and manufacturers, making it difficult and confusing for consumers. Echoing the views of stakeholders, recalls were considered most effective for products bought from new, as opposed to second hand. When products were bought second hand, product information was often not retained, making it harder for consumers to identify if their product was affected. For registered products, failure to transfer details across owners disrupts traceability.

“I think the recall process up until the point of alerting the public seems very robust. Companies know the law will be enforced and generally adhere to it and do their best. I feel fairly safe as a consumer in the UK. However, if there is a recall I think the public are informed in too inconsistent a way. It is easy to miss recalls if you do not read a particular newspaper or website on the day information is published and there needs to be a more reliable way of getting information to the public.” Consumer

4.1.3 Monitoring Success

Consumers understood that the effectiveness of recalls was most probably measured based on **product return rate**. They recognised this as a relevant measure but were concerned that it did not account for the fact that many people would choose to throw

away a product rather than return it, or that individuals could choose to continue using the product if they deemed the risk low.

There were some suggestions for alternative outcome measures. Manufactures could instead measure **consumer awareness** of the recall, rather than actual response rate. This would account for the above challenges, although it was acknowledged that this would be difficult to measure.

Other measures suggested included **monitoring customer satisfaction** with the process and the timescale of action. Ultimately, it was felt that a recall could be considered successful if there was **no resulting incidents or injuries**. Some did not see complete return as necessary to ensure this, but others recognised that this was the only method to completely ensure risk removal.

4.1.4 Responsibility

Consumers generally saw **manufacturers** as having overall responsibility for recalls and felt companies should be legally required to have robust safety and recall processes in place. The **retailer** was also seen to have some responsibility and was expected to play a role in raising consumer awareness of recalls.

Government was seen to have overall responsibility for ensuring product safety standards are met, via the provision of frameworks and guidance to support businesses, monitoring of businesses compliance and involvement in cases of negligence. Few felt government should be involved in consumer contact, and many expressed a reluctance to share contact details with the government for recall purposes. However, they did feel that in extreme circumstances, government could assist in recall awareness through sharing national messages and campaigns. Some consumers were aware of **regulatory bodies** such as the Health and Safety Executive and perceived these organisations to have a role in monitoring and enforcing safety standards and raising awareness of recalls.

Participants in the community did not feel the onus or responsibility should be placed on **consumers** to report problems or actively look out recall information. In general, consumers who received a recall notice felt they had the right to keep, return or throw away a product according to their own risk assessment. However, some did feel that they held some responsibility to return a product, to improve standards or avoid harm to others.

4.2 Consumer experience of recalls

4.2.1 Risk perception

Consumers reflected that they often made **personal risk assessments** when encountering product recall notifications, to make an informed decision about whether to respond to a recall notice, particularly when the product was only used by themselves.

Consumers primarily saw risk as a personal issue and felt that they should be entitled to do this. Some suggested that **risk levels could be communicated more effectively** to help inform their decision. They felt recall notifications should include a severity index of some format (e.g. traffic light ratings), alongside more information about the nature of the fault and the risk posed.

“I'd respond differently based on perception of likelihood of problem occurring and potential severity if it did occur. A vehicle problem at high speed may be unlikely but could

have serious consequences for those in the vehicle and third parties, so I'd view this safety recall more seriously than a vacuum cleaner recall, although I accept that there could be instances (e.g. serious electrical fire risk) where I'd treat the vacuum issue seriously too." Consumer

4.2.2 Notification

Consumers **expected to be notified** if a product they owned gets recalled. They **did not expect to have to search out information** and did not tend to do so. They were largely unaware that recall databases existed and did not feel it should be their responsibility to check these. Some did suggest they might engage with information on recalls if it was presented in an **easy and accessible** format, for example a weekly email digest or SMS alerts for severe cases.

Consumers would prefer **direct contact**, particularly when the product poses a severe risk and most were willing to provide contact data for use in these instances. However, others were wary about doing so, in case details were used for marketing purposes. They felt businesses could improve the way they obtain and use contact details by clearly stating why contact data was being collected and being **transparent and honest** about what data would be used for. Here most felt that they wanted brands to be explicit about when they are collecting details for safety purposes, and not to conflate this with other uses of data, such as marketing. In cases where companies would not have contact details, consumers felt recall notices for high-risk products should be shared through multiple high-reach channels, such as online, traditional media and social media.

"Giving your phone number or email address would be fine as long as you didn't start receiving spam and advertising emails etc. I'd only want them to contact me if it was because of an issue with a product I'd purchased." Consumer

"A manufacturer or retailer should be able to identify with some precision who is impacted by a product issue, given the amount of data they gather about all of us. I would expect EU/UK standards to require a decent level of precision rather than some generic blanket comms" Consumer

Consumers wanted recall notices to clearly outline the product affected, the **nature and severity of the risk** and **details on how to take action**. Direction about how to **identify whether a product was impacted**, such as date ranges or batch codes were considered useful, and **photographs** were also seen as an important aid to easily communicate and help aid recognition of products. Consumers also welcomed the idea of a **clearer system for assessing risk**, such as a traffic light rating clearly highlighted on notifications.

Consumers had seen recall notifications from a **variety of sources**, for example adverts or notices in a physical or online store, online news articles or direct contact by a company for high value registered products such as cars and domestic appliances, or as part of a blanket communication to loyalty card customers.

The method by which consumers were notified of a recall could **impact their perceptions of the severity and subsequent choice of action**. For example, a recall mentioned on a consumer watchdog television programme would be taken incredibly seriously, whereas a notice stumbled across on a website would not seem as important.

Some channels were less favoured for communications about product recalls. **Postal** communications were considered ineffective and likely to be missed or lost amongst junk

mail. They were seen as particularly inappropriate for severe risk cases where more rapid communication channels should be used. **Phone calls** were considered overly intrusive. **Text messages** were more acceptable, but most would prefer these only to be used in severe circumstances. Notifications in **stores** were seen as passive and insufficient to draw attention to recalls. Consumers were unlikely to regularly check individual **retailer or manufacturer websites** and felt these to be ineffective channels.

Other channels received more favourable responses. **Online articles**, for example on social media or news websites, were seen as useful for raising awareness, as they signalled importance and could be widely shared. **Social media** posts were also mentioned as a potentially useful tool, but one which relied on consumers following the relevant retailers or consumer bodies, which they were unlikely to do. **Targeted social media** accounts were seen as a useful way to target those most likely to be affected by a recall (for example allergen charities in the case of food recalls). In general, electronic methods such as emails and social media were preferred, although it was acknowledged that communications may get lost in the deluge of information.⁵

Consumers felt the **manufacturer or retailer should be the main messenger** for communications, with the government stepping in to raise awareness of particularly important recalls

4.3 Motivations and Barriers

The likelihood of consumers responding to a recall notification depended on many factors such as the value of the product, the effort involved in returning the product, the level of risk and the relevance or importance of the product. The **main barriers to action were a difficult or time consuming process, a low level of perceived risk and a low product value**. The **main motivations for taking action were regular use of a product, high perceived level of risk and a clear and easy process for responding**.

4.3.1 Motivations

Consumers who **personally experienced an issue** with a product were more likely to act. If a consumer noticed a recall, but had been using the product without issue, they were less likely to respond.

Consumers were more likely to return products if the **return process was easy and convenient**. For example, if they could return a product to a frequently visited shop. When products needed to be returned by post consumers expected pre-paid postage and packaging, and would ideally have the product collected from their home.

Consumers were more motivated to return **newer and higher value** products, although the assessment of this varied depending on consumer circumstances. Products that were perceived to present a **greater risk** of personal harm (e.g. fire risk) were more likely to prompt a response, as were those which presented a **risk to children** or other vulnerable audience. When making personal risk assessments, consumers did consider the potential impact on others. For example, a car recall may be taken more seriously due to the risk to other road users.

⁵ It is also worth noting that the research was conducted via an online community, and therefore views may not reflect less technologically able consumers.

However, consumers were still likely to throw low value products away, rather than return them. A minority of consumers were motivated to return products based on a perception that doing so would **improve standards** and the future safety of products in some way.

Consumers felt that **additional incentives** could motivate them to return products, for example additional vouchers on top of the product value. They also felt companies should offer alternate routes to acknowledging recall response, such as sending a photograph of the product as proof of disposal.

4.3.2 Barriers

Consumers were generally reluctant to respond to recalls, and appeared to make a **cost-effort trade off**, which varied depending on a person's circumstances. For example, consumers with a lower income may be more likely to respond to recalls, and those living in rural areas with less access to postal service or stores may be less likely to respond.

Consumers were unlikely to respond to recalls which required **significant effort** or **disruption to daily routines**. This was particularly the case for low value products and those requiring booked appointments or requiring the consumer to be without an important product for a length of time (e.g. a washing machine or car).

Lengthy and burdensome return processes also increased reluctance. Consumers were unlikely to visit a store specifically to return an item and were unwilling to put effort in to print return labels and visit post offices in the case of postal returns.

Requiring a receipt or proof of purchases was also seen to reduce response rates, as consumers were unlikely to keep these for lower value products

5. Case Study: Small Electrical Items

This section outlines a recall involving a small electrical item that was identified as a fire risk, with steps taken during the recall process achieving 95% response rate. It reviews in detail the actions taken, actors involved, drivers and barriers of effectiveness and subsequent industry learnings. Overall, it demonstrates the success of implementing an innovative, multi-channel communication campaign involving paid-for social media adverts and emailing all customers, with or without their prior consent, to overcome traceability issues. It also highlights the benefits of the retailer having a proactive, safety-first ethos, established recall processes and trusted relationships with Trading Standards and their Board Members. Finally, it suggests there is a need for more clarity around product safety versus data protection regulations and guidance on ways to systematically measure the effectiveness of different communication strategies.

5.1. Sector Context

Quality control is particularly challenging in this sector, with stakeholders reporting small electrical products as being **more likely to experience product safety issues and for these to require urgent action** to protect consumers when identified. This was attributed to the increasing number of counterfeit products and the challenge of vetting and maintaining quality control of suppliers based abroad. Moreover, when safety issues do occur the risk may be life-threatening, as seen in the following recall case.

Small electrical items can also be **difficult to trace when issues occur**. Unlike large domestic items, small electrical products are very unlikely to be registered, which hinders the ease of identifying and contacting customers who have purchased the affected item. Additionally, there is the challenge of counterfeit products often being sold online. These may resemble the branded product, but leave the consumer unable to identify the manufacturer to report a problem once removed from the packaging.

Finally, these products can **range widely in their value and age**, in terms of the timeframe that consumers may own them. This can influence the ease or difficulty of successfully identifying customers and influencing them to return the product.

5.2. Recall Context

In **November 2017** a Christmas tree plug adaptor with remote control timer was identified as a **potential fire risk**. The product had been recently launched and was on promotion at the time. This and the seasonality of the product led to approximately 90,000 customers being affected. Although the issue was identified in the triple 2017 version, the double version which had been on sale since 2014 was also recalled. This recall took place before the PAS 7100 guidelines were published.

The main actor involved was **a large retailer with a strong product safety ethos**. The retailer considers itself to be the main actor responsible when a product safety issue occurs and is prepared to respond quickly, invest money and resource and take potential reputational risks when needed to mitigate the impact and protect consumers. The retailer

has a trusted relationship with its Primary Authority Partnership (PAP)⁶ and long-standing internal recall processes that have been in place prior to PAS 7100.

The main challenge during the recall process was the **difficulty of tracing customers who had purchased the product**. This was due to the low value of the product and there being no mechanism for customers to register it. This resulted in the retailer having a limited number of contact details for customers who had purchased the product using their loyalty card.

To overcome this challenge, the retailer implemented a **multi-channel communication strategy that included a social media campaign and emailing their entire customer database**, with or without prior consent. This resulted in 91% of the triple 2017 version of the product being recalled in the first 6 weeks and a **95% recall rate overall**.

5.3. Recall Process Map

The table below provides an overview of the recall process implemented, including steps taken and actors involved. It illustrates that the retailer was the main driving force throughout the process, with its PAP, legal advisor, the fire service and Electrical Safety First providing support. Whilst the retailer notified their Chinese supplier, the manufacturer of the product was not involved beyond this. The following sections review each stage of the process in detail.

Table 1. Small Electrical Items Process Map

Identifying the issue & legal notification	Risk assessment & choice of action	Recall measures			Conclusion & review
Retailer	Retailer	Retailer	Retailer	Retailer	Retailer
Product issue identified via customer feedback in-store and on social media. In-store team reported issue after first incident. Product removed from sale following second report.	Conducted internal lab testing on existing stock to identify source and level of risk. Risk assessment team briefed internal product safety committee on their findings and decided on full product recall.	Started by tracing customers through loyalty card and soon after launched two-wave press campaign across national and regional press. All communications pushed to stop use, return product and call dedicated phone line. Return rates monitored throughout.	Launched sponsored social media campaign	Emailed all customers within their customer database, including those who had not given prior consent.	95% product return rate Strategy seen as proportionate to level of risk, with positive brand impact experienced Justified for certain severity, but would not advise being go-to strategy
Supplier	Electrical Safety First		Fire services	Legal advisor	
Retailer notified Chinese product manufacturer	Retailer sought input from ESF on risks associated with this type of product.		Reposted social media recall notice	Provided advice on contacting customers without their consent	Have repeated strategy with more customer complaints highlighting data protection vs protect safety tension
PAP	PAP	PAP			
Retailer notified PAP	Reviewed risk assessment and signed-off recall plan	Published recall notice, monitored response rates provided by retailer and discussed changes to communication strategy			Retailer now focused on improving customer traceability and measuring comms effectiveness

5.4. Issue Identification and Legal Notification

This stage of the process was said to be mostly straight forward and efficient, facilitated by the retailer's established internal incident management system and proactive approach to notifying their PAP of the product safety issue.

⁶ Primary Authority enables businesses to form a legal partnership with one local authority, which then provides assured and tailored advice on complying with environmental health, trading standards or fire safety regulations that other local regulators must respect.

Customer complaints were said to be closely monitored in-store and on social media, with these being logged onto an **incident management system** so that head office can quickly identify patterns. This therefore enabled the team to quickly and effectively become aware of the severity of the issue and remove the product from sale after receiving an image posted on social media of a melted plug socket.

Trading Standards also emphasised the **speed and proactiveness** of the retailer in notifying them of the issue and keeping them informed throughout the recall process, with this not always said to be the case.

“They treat issues seriously and do act early, and keep us in the loop. I get frequent emails with warning of issues.... It’s more difficult when we don’t have established relationship with a business, because then they might not be familiar with TS expectations.” Trading Standards

5.5. Risk Assessment and Choice of Action

This stage was reported as being challenge-free due to the retailer’s internal risk assessment and recall systems, their trusted relationship with Trading Standards and their Board Members, and the severity of the risk identified.

Similar to the previous stage, the retailer’s established product recall processes facilitated an efficient process and decisive action being taken. A few factors played into this. Firstly, the retailer emphasised the **speed and robustness of their risk assessment processes**, a view also voiced by Trading Standards. They felt that whilst this is a problem area for the industry overall, the retailer’s internal team is highly skilled and comprehensive in their assessments.

Secondly, the retailer highlighted the advantage of their **cross-department product safety committee** who are specifically trained in responding to product safety issues and can be convened at short notice to enable decisions to be made quickly. The team is said to be extremely committed and conscientious, working around-the-clock when an issue occurs.

Thirdly, the retailer’s established and trusted relationship with their Board Members and PAP was said to play an important role. In particular, the retailer viewed the **trust and support of their Board Members** as a key factor contributing to the success of the recall. Specifically, they valued that the Board trusted the recommendations put forward by the product safety committee and were willing to invest money and take steps that may present reputational risks to ensure consumer safety. This ethos facilitated fast sign-off on decisions around the choice of recall action and measures. The retailer’s long-standing and trusted relationship with Trading Standards was another benefit, resulting in their internal risk assessment and recall plan being quickly signed-off.

“A key driver of success was that the board are intent on doing the right thing. If you’ve got a product safety problem, having a board that trusts its colleagues to do the right thing, is obviously key.” Legal Compliance Manager

In combination with the above facilitators, all actors involved highlighted the benefit of the **product safety issue being severe, resulting in a clear-cut decision**. The fact the product presented a fire risk, which was life-threatening, combined with the seasonality of

the product and it being on promotion, led to a clear consensus that a full product recall was required

5.6. Recall Measures Implemented

5.6.1. Traditional communication approach

Tracing customers who had purchased the product was the biggest challenge for the retailer. Their initial efforts of implementing traditional communication approaches resulted in limited success with more innovative strategies subsequently being required.

The traceability challenge stemmed from the product not being registered and the retailer not knowing who had purchased it beyond the **small proportion of customers using a loyalty card at the point of transaction**. This meant that whilst they were immediately able to check whether these customers had purchased the product and contact those affected, this method resulted in tracing only a small proportion of products sold (5-10%). The retailer also promptly published recall notices in-store. However, despite being a common recall approach for reaching consumers, the retailer felt **in-store notices were largely ineffective** due to the low likelihood of customers returning to the store and seeing the notice, particularly those who had bought the product.

The third traditional approach implemented was a **large-scale press campaign**. Given the high risk the retailer decided it was proportionate to invest heavily in product recall adverts across multiple national and regional newspapers. On top of this, they experienced high levels of free press coverage. Noting that it is often difficult to receive free press coverage for product recalls due to the volumes of recall notices, they believed that in this instance strong press interest was driven by the seasonality and severity of the product safety risk. The retailer also highlighted the advantage of having a **dedicated product recall customer service phone line** to facilitate the return process. This team was described as being specifically trained and available at short-notice to handle incoming recall related customer calls among those seeking guidance.

However, despite these facilitators, the retailer was aware that typical recall rates resulting from traditional communication strategies is around 10%, which they did not feel in this circumstance was proportionate to the risk. As a result, in the hope of exceeding this figure, the product safety committee **identified new strategies** as part of its ongoing monitoring of the effectiveness of the recall campaign.

“We had details of some customers that had bought the product through the loyalty card but not many. We knew we could do direct emails fairly immediately, as well as notices in store... We got really high article coverage compared to normal... there was real consensus of the danger and that drove us to take more action.” Head of Communications

5.6.2. Social Media Strategy

Aiming for greater reach, the retailer decided to try a new approach, investing in paid-for social media adverts. However, whilst the campaign went viral, this strategy still had its limitations.

The retailer decided to implement a **paid-for social media campaign** on Facebook and Twitter as they were aware that consumer engagement with their branded social media

pages is low. Investing in product recall adverts would therefore guarantee high levels of exposure on these channels.

The content of the recall notice was considered an important factor in facilitating the effectiveness of this strategy. The retailer ensured the social media post conveyed a **clear warning and enabled the customer to identify the product and take action** by using the following strategies:

- A large, bold headline to grab people's attention
- Visual cues (a large yellow warning sign with exclamation mark) to warn customers and highlight the importance of the message
- Product image and barcode to aid product identification
- Clear call to action to inform customers on what to do (in this case, stop using the product and return it in-store in exchange for a refund)
- Large/bolded telephone number to enable customers to seek support

Partnering with other service providers was identified as being another driver of effectiveness. For example, the fire services reposted the retailer's recall notice, enabling them to gain additional exposure. Overall, this social media strategy achieved '**viral impact**' reaching 20-30 million social media accounts.

However, **this approach was also felt to have drawbacks**, with the retailer highlighting challenges that hindered its effectiveness. One limitation was the **broad profile of customers who purchased the product**. A social media campaign was thought to be most effective if the retailer has a narrow and specific target audience. Due to the nature of the product this was not the case and the retailer was **not able to take a targeted approach**, resulting in their adverts being shown to anyone over 25 years old.

Linked to this, the retailer also highlighted the **difficulty of assessing direct reach**. Thus, whilst the social media campaign went viral, it was not possible to determine the effectiveness of this strategy in terms of this method directly reaching affected customers. As a result of this, and rates of return not being deemed sufficient (following this activity recall rates had spiked to approximately 18%), the retailer decided to take one final step.

5.6.3. Customer Database Mailout Strategy

After careful consideration, the retailer made the bold decision to email its entire customer marketing database, including those customers who were not opted in to receiving marketing communications.

This decision was not taken lightly. The retailer was concerned that emailing customers without their consent may have **potential legal resource implications**. Alongside this, they were worried about the companies' **reputational risk** and the possibility of receiving consumer complaints. They were also aware that large-scale mailouts take time to administer and can negatively impact email algorithms, running the risk of reducing customer email open rates in the future.

Despite these drawbacks, the retailer decided that the benefits outweighed the risks, with this strategy providing the opportunity to achieve extensive and direct reach among customers affected. They also highlighted several factors that facilitated this approach.

“We took the view that safety trumped everything.” Regulatory Services Manager

First, they **consulted their Legal Team** who helped the retailer navigate the legal landscape and gave them confidence in this being a legitimate strategy due to the severity of the risk and recall rate to date. Following this, their **supportive PAP and Board Members** gave the product safety committee sign-off on the strategy.

Second, to increase the likelihood of success, the retailer implemented a **batch mailout approach** to avoid emails going into customers’ spam inbox. Whilst they were originally concerned about customer responses to this approach, in reality they experienced minimal negative reaction. However, it is important to note that this was likely due to the recall taking place prior to GDPR being introduced.

Third, in terms of assessing the impact of this approach, the retailer was able to **track email open rates**. Whilst not a perfect measurement, this was seen as an improvement compared to social media measurements. Additionally, within 9 days of the email being sent, recall rates had increased to approximately 59%, with this being an indicator of the effectiveness of this approach. However, overall they emphasised the difficulty of measuring the success of this strategy. Whilst product return rates were very high and correlated with the mailout strategy, they could not be certain which element of the communication campaign drove success.

5.7. Retailer Reflections

Whilst highly effective and considered necessary in the circumstances of this recall case, the retailer recommends using a large-scale mailout approach sparingly and is now focused on improving customer traceability.

A ‘proportionate’ response was felt to be key when deciding on a recall strategy, with actions taken during this process being considered more extensive than usual but proportionate to the level of risk. They believed the 95% return rate exemplified the benefits of using a social media and mailout strategy. This response rate was said to be ‘unheard of’ and **showcases what is achievable by implementing an innovative, multi-channel communication strategy**. Notably, the retailer also acknowledged the role of seasonality and of the product having only been recently purchased and used, with return rates of the 2014 version of the plug being lower.

All agreed they would implement the same response again for similarly high-risk cases. However, they would only **recommend using the large-scale mailout element for exceptional instances** involving life-threatening product safety issues. For this recall case, after careful consideration and trying other strategies it was deemed necessary and was highly effective for increasing return rates. However, if this strategy was to be used regularly it was expected to reduce its effectiveness due to the impact on algorithms, email open rates and consumer engagement. Additionally, they have since repeated this strategy following the implementation of GDPR, with higher volumes of customers emailing to complain. As a result, the retailer and Trading Standards wanted greater clarification from the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) and OPSS around the **perceived tension between product safety and data protection regulations**.

To better assess which channels and messaging are driving product returns, since this recall the product safety committee requests daily call centre reports during a recall process, combined with a staggered communication approach. However, they feel there is **opportunity to improve the process of measuring communication effectiveness** and would value support in this area.

The retailer concluded that despite initial concerns, they believed there is greater reputational risk in not taking enough action to ensure customer safety, compared to receiving a small proportion of complaints, and their efforts overall had a positive brand impact.

"We got good press for having done the responsible thing.... the Chief Fire Officer retweeting the safety notice that was published on social media saying great job (retailer) - that looks very good, and that's great.... You don't want to be the brand at the heart of a story telling everyone you're not particularly responsible to fulfilling your obligations around product safety." Legal Compliance Manager

5.8. Consumer Perspective

Online community participants reviewing this case study had mixed views on the social media strategy but were largely in support of the mailout approach.

Consumers generally felt a **social media strategy alone would not be sufficient**. Whilst some thought the social media campaign was an effective way to achieve widespread reach, many believed they were unlikely to see the recall notice through these channels. They also felt it would not be effective for targeting less tech-savvy and older groups.

In comparison, despite the retailer's concerns around consumer backlash, most online community participants were in support of the customer database mailout strategy. **Many said they would not mind their details being used in situations such as this where there is a serious safety issue, even if they had opted not to be contacted by the retailer for marketing purposes**. In this instance, the speed of action taken was considered most important, with some of the opinion that emailing the customer database should have been the first port of call. Additionally, a few suggested the retailer should make it more explicit why contact details are required at POS in order to increase rates of consent and ease of contacting customers when issues arise.

"I don't mind this despite the lack of permission. It's not promotional in any way it's putting people's safety first and so I think given that their initial approach didn't work this was smart" Online community participant

Overall **customers widely appreciated the level of effort and number of steps taken by the retailer** to reach customers, resulting in positive brand perceptions.

"I think the fact that the retailer persisted to contact their consumers via different methods shows they took this recall very seriously." Online community participant

5.9. ICO Perspective

ICO reported that data protection law enables organisations to contact customers for safety reasons, even without consent, and ensures such contact is secure, fair and proportionate.

In contrast to the retailer and Trading Standards involved in this case, **ICO did not perceive there to be tension between product safety and GDPR legislation, with a product safety risk seen as ‘necessary’ use of data.**

ICO explained that organisations need to have a lawful basis to process data in the context of a product recall, with consent being one of the lawful bases. However, there are 5 others in Article 6 of the UK GDPR and it may be that another is more appropriate than consent depending on the context. UK data protection law should therefore not prevent the mailout strategy or retailers retaining customer data for product safety. However, **the use of data needs to be ‘legitimate’, ‘necessary’, ‘proportionate’ with businesses ‘accountable’.**

ICO particularly emphasised the importance of businesses being ‘proportionate’ in their actions. For this reason, emailing the entire database and not a proportion would not be advised but could be justified in certain circumstances where the risk is particularly severe. Similarly, **keeping customer records for an indefinite time would never be classified as necessary.** The businesses would need to define a timeframe and provide their rationale.

ICO also noted the **need to ensure email content is not a form of marketing** otherwise Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations would apply. Marketing would include any form of financial incentivisation to encourage consumers to return the affected product, such as a discount on a future purchase. This is important to consider when thinking about potential strategies to encourage customers to respond to a recall notice, with this being a prominent recall challenge.

5.10. Recall Learnings

This case study revealed several learnings that are relevant across product categories, with some being more amplified for small electrical items:

- The return rates achieved exemplify **the benefits of businesses having a safety-first philosophy**, taking risks, thinking outside the box and not accepting traditionally low recall rates by relying on traditional recall strategies.
- This case highlights the benefits of **establishing trusted relationships** with Board Members and Trading Standards, in addition to partnering with other relevant actors, such as the fire service.
- Findings suggest **a social media campaign can be a valuable addition to the recall communication toolbox** although there are targeting limitations and it is best combined with other approaches.
- **More clarity is needed from ICO and OPSS around the perceived tensions between product safety issues and data protection**, with a need to provide guidance on how to interpret GDPR requirements in the context of a recall, how to determine proportionality and examples of the types of evidence that can support accountability.
- For severe recall cases with low consumer traceability, a customer database mailout approach can be considered – however, this case suggests **there is a need**

for businesses to develop ways to identify and contact only affected customers, particularly for small electrical items that are typically not registered.

- Findings also suggest businesses would value **greater guidance around measuring the impact and effectiveness** of different types of recall measures to help them decide on the optimal communication channels and messaging.
- Finally, this recall highlights the role of contextual factors (e.g., the product only recently having been recently on sale, the Christmas season, the type of risk) in aiding or hindering the effectiveness of a recall strategy and **the importance of early identification of product safety issues**.

6. Case Study: Large Domestic Appliances

This section outlines a corrective action carried out by a large electronics retailer on one of their own-brand tumble dryers that had been identified as a fire risk, which eventually achieved a success rate of around 98%. The section reviews in detail the actions taken, actors involved, drivers and barriers of effectiveness and subsequent industry learnings. Overall, it demonstrates the power of retailers collecting customer contact information at POS for increasing traceability, as well as the importance of a multi-channel strategy for prompting customer engagement following contact. It also highlights some of the potential benefits and challenges of using customer payment data and working with banks to contact customers who cannot be reached by other channels, suggesting that further work from government is needed in this area to explore issues around feasibility and responsibility.

6.1. Sector Context

The domestic appliance is characterised by relatively high levels of attention to product safety and recalls, with **high perceived risks leading to a focus on action** from all parties, including manufacturers, retailers, public bodies and consumers compared to other categories. There is a recognition from both manufacturers and retailers that when safety issues occur in large electronic products, they are more likely to present life threatening risks. This is particularly the case in more recent years, following the Grenfell disaster in 2017 and a series of high-profile recalls from Whirlpool. As well as the prevention of loss of life, retailers and manufacturers also take seriously the reputational risks associated with a high profile product safety incident.

The sector is also characterised by **high levels of traceability**, though with some important gaps. Firstly, there are relatively high levels of registration with manufacturers, incentivised by offers of activating or extending warranties. Importantly, retailers also often typically collect customer data at the POS, for the purpose of product delivery or in case of incident, and can use this data in the case of their own product recall event or work with manufacturers to support them elsewhere. However, registration data is often incomplete and typically does not contain the exact product serial number. It also often out-of-date for older products, as it is rarely updated when a product or owner moves.

6.2. Recall Context

In 2017, customer repair information collected by a large electronics retailer identified an **issue within an own-brand tumble dryer as posing a potential fire risk**. The product had been sold to approximately 250,000 customers, although following an analysis of the issue, the fault was confirmed to be due to an issue with a specific component in around 2,500 units.

The main actor involved was a large electronics retailer, which also manufactures and sells its own own-brand products. The retailer places a **strong emphasis on customer relationships and marketplace reputation**, with a focus on safety, specific designated roles for product safety incidents, and experience of other recalls. As they were **both the**

retailer and manufacturer of the product, there was no need for coordination around the sharing of product registration data.

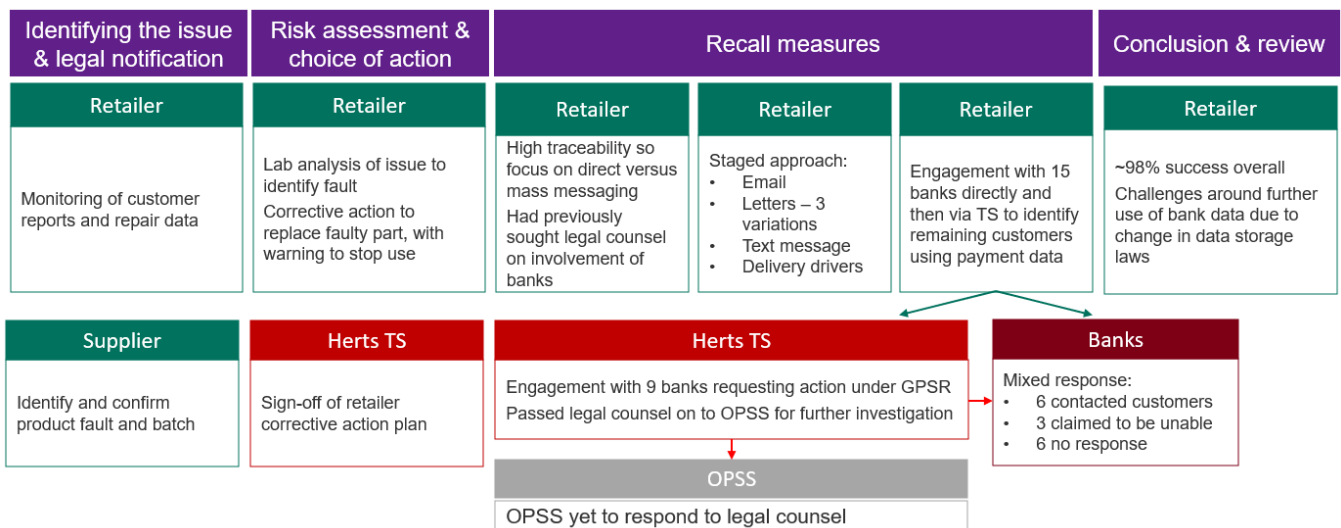
Systems in place to ensure traceability included a **flag for retail staff to ask all customers purchasing large electronic appliances to supply their contact details at POS**, even if the item was not being delivered. The retailer also has a trusted relationship with its Primary Authority Partnership within Trading Standards, with whom they had worked with on previous recalls.

The key **challenge for this recall was contacting customers who could not be reached via the retailers own traceability measures**. To overcome this, the retailer reached out to banks following their own multi-channel contact strategy to help identify the small number of customers they were yet to contact using customer payment records. The response from banks was mixed, but it did enable the recall to reach a small number of additional customers. These contacts were not enough to significantly add to the overall success rate of approximately 98%.

6.3. Recall Process Map

The table below provides an overview of the recall process implemented, including steps taken and actors involved. It illustrates that the retailer was the main driving force throughout the process, working alongside its PAP at Trading Standards to provide support. In total 15 banks were contacted, although there was a mixed reaction in terms of response and whether they were able to help identify and contact customers of the product. Herts Trading Standards (TS) and the retailer also engaged with OPSS to provide clarity on the potential role of banks, although this was not actioned within the timeframe of the recall.

Table 2. Large Domestic Appliances Process Map



The following sections review each stage of the process in detail.

6.4. Issue Identification and Legal Notification

This stage of the process was reported to be relatively straightforward, due to robust internal systems for identifying issues and close working relationships between the retailer and their PAP and component supplier.

The retailer has an **internal incident management system in place** to monitor customer complaints and repair data and facilitate the proactive identification of issues. In this case an issue was flagged with the product in question based on repair data.

The retailer also has its **own internal technical testing facility**, allowing them to rapidly perform a technical laboratory analysis to identify the source of the issue, which in this case was narrowed down to a fault with a specific component that could be easily replaced as part of a straightforward engineer visit.

Due to the **close relationship between the retailer and their Primary Authority Partnership at Trading Standards**, there was an established channel of communication for sharing details of the issue and providing legal notification alongside a suggested action. Trading Standards were invited to visit the laboratory and provided with a technical analysis of the issue, as well as recommendations for how to proceed with the recall, to which they provided sign off.

Communications with the supplier of the element were also important to identify how many machines were affected. Again, due to close working practices the **retailer was able to work with the supplier, based in China, to identify that the issue was with a specific production batch**, which they were able to trace back to 2,500 of their product.

“We were able to identify the issue as being due to a faulty component, so we notified Trading Standards and then contacted the element supplier to ascertain the production batch” Retailer

6.5. Risk Assessment and Choice of Action

Assessing risk and determining the choice of action was also considered relatively straightforward in this case, as the nature of the issue was clear and could be addressed via a simple component replacement on-site.

The retailer emphasised the **speed and robustness of their internal risk assessment processes**, which utilise their internal Management Information System and technical laboratory analysis, which enabled a rapid identification of the problem without a reliance on outside actors.

The process was **overseen and driven forward by a very senior team, led by the Group Technical Director**, enabling rapid decision-making. This senior engagement was reported to reflect a corporate culture driven by a focus on customer satisfaction and safety as part of reputation and brand management.

The risk assessment identified the fault and resulting **safety risk as arising from one specific component, which could easily be replaced by their own engineers as a simple on-site fix**. This led to the decision to carry out a corrective action, rather than a full recall, both to minimise costs and inconvenience for the customer, increasing the speed and efficiency with which the issue could be addressed. The decision was made not

to use an above the line (e.g., mass media) campaign, due to the decreasing reach of any specific channel in recent times, the potential for customer confusion or concern even if they owned an unaffected product, and potential reputational risks.

The customer notification sent out to notify those who had bought the product (see section 6.6 below for further details) was accompanied by a request to stop using the product until it could be repaired. This was deemed reasonable due to the product type and timing of the recall. The recall occurred in the spring/summer months which are warmer and typically associated with less frequent usage of tumble dryers. It is unclear the extent to which customers followed this advice.

6.6. Recall Measures Implemented

6.6.1. Direct contact measures

High levels of customer management information coupled with the reach of the retailer meant that a large proportion of customers could be contacted using traditional methods, although a lack of serial number information meant that communications had to go to all customers who had purchased the product rather than the smaller number affected.

As the product was a own-brand product, the retailer was able to take swift action, without the need to involve other parties, as would be the case in a manufacturer recall. This efficiency was bolstered by the involvement of a senior team, who were able to focus immediately on the issue and draw on previous experience of what works.

Success at this stage was also underpinned by **high levels of traceability**. The retailer has a policy of asking all purchasers of large domestic products for their contact details at the point of sale, and as such they have some kind of data on record for all customers except a small minority who had refused. Data is held for varying lengths of time dependent on the product type (for example, data collected for a refrigerator is held for longer than a mobile phone). However, this customer detail will only have registered the address, telephone number and emails given at the time of purchase, which may have since changed. In this case, the product was relatively young, at around 2 years old, so the data held was more likely to be accurate and up to date.

In addition, not all of this information was on record for all customers and the information on record was **only registered against the purchase of a product and not a specific machine identifiable by its serial number**, which is not available at the POS. This meant that communications had to go out to all c.250,000 purchasers of the product, rather than the owners of the c.2,500 machines affected.

Despite these issues with the data, high levels of traceability enabled the retailer to contact almost all customers who had bought the product directly. They did so using a **variety of different channels to maximise the speed with which they act and increase cut-through**. Initial communications went out via email, as this was the quickest and simplest to action. This was rapidly followed by a variety of different letter types, in a brown envelope, white envelope and postcard format. Following this, a text message was sent to customers, to further boost cut-through. Throughout this process a record was kept of responses, so that communications could be focused on those who were yet to reply at the next stage.

In addition to these channels, the retailer also **utilised their delivery driver network** to call directly at addresses that had not responded by other means when delivering in the area. This additional reach allowed the retailer to contact some customers who had not responded by other means and confirm if the details that they held were no longer valid. The retailer did not receive any negative feedback from customers contacted in this way. In total, using these approaches, the retailer was able to achieve an approximately 98% recall rate.

6.6.2. Working with banks

The retailer engaged with banks to attempt to reach customers that they had been unable to contact via other means, but the response was patchy with no real leverage to require action, even with support from Trading Standards.

In 2012, the retailer had sought to use payment details to contact customers via their banks but had had little success. Following this they had sought legal counsel on the potential responsibility of banks in the case of a recall event. This **legal counsel had concluded that banks have a potential responsibility to act under section 15 of the General Product Safety Regulations (GPSR)**. They had shared this advice with their Primary Authority Partnership at Trading Standards, who worked alongside the retailer in this case to contact banks and ask them to take action.

The retailer liaised with their internal IT security team to **access payment data from their own systems for customers who had bought the product** and had not been contactable by other means. This data was however limited to purchases made within the last three years, due to data storage under GDPR. The payment detail included the Bank Identification Number, which enabled the retailer to identify 15 banks via whom purchases had been made, with only a handful of customers at each.

Following this, the retailer attempted to make contact with the banks, although this was challenging due to the **lack of pre-existing relationships or any obvious role to contact regarding the request**. As such, the retailer ended up searching the internet for the contact details of the company secretary, explaining the issue and asking them to send on a copy of the recall letter along with whatever notice they felt was appropriate. At this stage, the request was not made with the promise of any commercial compensation, but the retailer states that they were willing to recoup any costs incurred if requested.

Given the lack of any specific contact or any precedent for action, **the response from banks varied depending on how and by whom the message was received**. Around six of the 15 banks responded immediately, although with various degrees of willingness to help. At some banks there was no clear responsibility for who would action the request, which stalled progress. Some others claimed that they were unable to identify customers using the payment details provided. Some banks raised concerns about data sharing, although the retailer was able to reassure them that there was no need for banks to share customer details as they would be making contact directly.

Eventually some of these banks did contact their customers with some small measure of success. The **extent to which banks were willing to cooperate may have depended to some extent on their culture**. For example, the contact at one bank, which has a strong reputation for customer service, made it a personal mission to directly phone each of the handful of customers affected.

Following this initial contact from the retailer, **Trading Standards also made contact with the remaining nine banks**, first with a copy of the recall notice and letters in a friendly tone, writing generically to the legal department. One bank responded positively to this, contacting their customers and signposting them to the retailer. Two banks responded to say that they were unable to identify customers using the data provided and so were unable to help.

Trading Standards wrote one final time to the six outstanding banks, this time in a more forceful tone mentioning section 15 of GPSR to imply that they had the powers to enforce. Only one bank responded to this final letter, again claiming that they were unable to help. **Trading Standards ultimately decided not to serve a recall notice requiring banks to act**, as they felt they lacked the resources of jurisdiction to enforce action without involvement from OPSS given the unprecedented nature of the approach.

As such, ultimately this approach was only able to generate contact with a handful of additional customers, with little impact on the overall success rate.

6.7. Retailer Reflections

Whilst the retailer was overall pleased with the success of the recall, they were concerned at the lack of clarity around the responsibility of banks to act and wished to explore this further with OPSS, as well as concerned that recent changes in how data is stored would limit the potential of this approach in future.

The retailer felt that the recall had been a success overall given the high proportion of customers successfully contacted. A record was kept of the materials used and of the success of each contact method, although as these were carried out consecutively there was no systematic comparison in relation to each other, which would require a more methodical experimental approach. The retailer also felt there was implicit learning within the team, for example around the use of delivery drivers, which could be incorporated into future recalls.

The case was also seen to provide **evidence that the provision of bank payment details to banks could provide additional reach to customers**, with the retailer keen to explore this further. From their perspective, the method had even greater potential for potentially risky low-ticket electronic items than for large domestic products, given the relatively much lower levels of traceability.

The retailer also expressed a **desire for greater engagement with the issue from OPSS**, who had not become involved after being contacted by the retailer. Based on the success of this case, they felt that coordination from national government would be needed to clarify responsibilities under the GPSR and create the traction needed to generate future engagement from banks.

Alongside this, they also expressed **concerns that the approach they had used was no longer possible for retailers**. This is because retailers no longer store the payment details for customer purchases, only a digital token corresponding to this data⁷, which is

⁷ Card tokenisation is the process of protecting sensitive data by replacing it with more secure, surrogate data, called a token. When a tokenised card is used for payment, only the token is used, without exposing sensitive card details like a personal account number (PAN), making the payment more secure.

held instead by the card acquirer (the intermediary organisation between banks and retailers). Given that retailers no longer have direct access to payment data, this change is likely to complicate any future attempts at working with banks to contact customers, as it will require the involvement of an additional partner who has not taken this role, as well as potentially creating new issues around data-sharing. Tokens are only held by retailers for two years, reducing the amount of time for which records would be relevant and further restricting its usefulness only to recent purchases.

6.8. Consumer Perspective

Online community participants reviewing this case study were typically in favour of banks sharing data if in regard to serious product safety incidents.

Some consumers **negatively assumed that the process would involve the sharing of personally identifiable information between banks and the retailer**, even though it was made clear that customer details were not shared by banks, and that banks contacted customers directly after being notified by the retailer.

Even when consumers were sensitive about data sharing generally, they **typically felt that sharing was acceptable in this case as it was being carried out in the name of customer safety** and showed that the retailer had gone the 'extra mile' for their customers.

At the same time, a number of consumers said that they would **not want this happening on a regular basis** as it would require too much data sharing and would also diminish the value of the notification or become annoying. As such, they felt such notifications should be limited to particularly high-risk items.

"I think it shows that the retailer is going down every avenue to make sure they can contact everyone who purchased one of the tumble driers. I also like that they explored every option too before involving the government and banks. I think this approach should be limited to particularly dangerous/ high risks only though" Online community participant

6.9. ICO Perspective

The ICO confirmed that data sharing may be a legitimate action if for the purposes of contacting customers due to a product safety issue – as long as the principles set out in the GDPR are followed.

The ICO perceived data sharing between manufacturers, retailers and banks for product safety reasons, in order to contact affected customers, to be a **legitimate use of data** if data protection law is followed. In practice, focusing on the UK GDPR Article 5 will greatly assist with this.

This means this form of data sharing would need to be evidenced as 'legitimate', 'necessary' and 'proportionate', with all businesses involved being 'accountable' for their actions. The ICO advised that in this situation they would **recommend manufacturers and retailers set up a data sharing agreement with data controllers (in this case, payment providers)** outlining the roles and responsibilities of each party and what data can be shared.

6.10. Recall Learnings

This case study revealed learnings that are relevant across product categories, and raise particular questions for the role of banks and OPSS:

- High levels of traceability highlight the **importance of POS as a channel for collecting customer contact information**, relevant in this case due to the involvement of the retailer – although it also shows how this channel can lack some of the information that could inform a more directed campaign e.g., product serial numbers.
- Success using traditional direct contact methods demonstrates the **importance of a multi-channel approach**, including here the use of delivery drivers for door-knocking as well as written and digital communications.
- The close working approach between Trading Standards and the retailer, particularly coordination around contacting banks, demonstrates **potential for effective collaboration** at this level.
- The case also demonstrates the **potential for banks to help identify customers**, but with further work needed to understand constraints on engagement by some and how best to facilitate effective engagement in future.
- Given the relative inability of either the retailer or Trading Standards to engage with banks, there is seen to be a **role for OPSS to take a lead and provide clarification on responsibilities** and help drive collaboration by different parties.
- This case also highlights **limits to the use of payment details and collaboration with banks**, including the fact that all retailers no longer hold full customer payment details and consumer resistance to widespread use for less risky products.
- Finally, the use of bank **details raises issues around data retention**, as purchase information is now only held for two years for GDPR purposes.

7. Case Study: Automotive Sector

This section outlines category specific challenges in the automotive sector and the strategies a manufacturer implemented to overcome these difficulties during a product recall. This recall involved a large HGV Truck which was identified as high risk, with steps taken during the recall process achieving >99% return rate. The section reviews in detail the actions taken, actors involved, drivers and barriers of effectiveness and subsequent industry learnings. Overall, it demonstrates the success of trialling innovative, multi-modal communications and streamlining recall processes to reduce consumer burden. It also highlights the benefits of cooperation and communication across actors. Although this sector falls outside of the remit of OPSS, the findings from this recall are useful and applicable to other sectors.

7.1. Sector Context

The automotive sector is characterised by **high product traceability**, with all vehicles registered to an owner's address. These details are held by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). Recalls are overseen by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) which adds a level of standardisation and accountability to the recall process

Similar to other product categories, the **age and value** of a product has a significant impact on recall response, with significantly lower responses seen for older models and second-hand vehicles as owners come to expect faults and become less engaged with dealership communications. The sector is also impacted by **brand reputation** concern and safety issues can be under- or over-played dependent on the manufacturer perspective. The DVSA oversight helps ensure manufacturers are not under- or over-exaggerating risks once they are reported, but some brands may still be slower to report safety concerns.

This sector is challenged by the **traceability of individual parts**. Companies which destroy or recycle cars must follow procedures, enabling parts to be traced, but smaller garages and 'DIY' car repairers do not always follow such processes and dangerous parts may be resold unknowingly and transferred into other models. Export can also cause challenges in tracing vehicles.

Consumers make their own risk-assessments, which are swayed by factors such as the **type of risk** (for example a fire risk may be taken more seriously than an airbag fault) and the frequency and way in which they use their vehicle. Recalls are also heavily reliant on vehicle owners engaging with notifications and making an effort to schedule and attend a repair appointment. Despite this, little is done to engage customers past an initial postal letter.

Several of these category challenges applied to the case studies reviewed in this section. The following sections outline the strategies used to overcome these difficulties and draw out learnings on ways to improve the effectiveness of recalls within this product category and more widely.

7.2. Recall Context

In 2017, regular safety checks identified a **fault in the rear axle of a HGV Truck**, which impacted 1,100 vehicles. This large vehicle was often used in quarries or work sites. The risk was considered severe due to the size and weight of the vehicle, and the potential damage it could cause.

The repair required technical skill, specialist tools and around 22 hours of work. This limited the number of dealerships who were able to accept repairs, due to lack of capacity and qualified mechanics.

The recall was made more difficult by the fact that vehicle drivers relied on the trucks for employment and income generation. This increased the reluctance to bring in vehicles for repair. Specialised loan vehicles were difficult to source and would not have the company branding, a further deterrent as this is an important form of marketing for companies using the trucks. In addition, the registered owners of the vehicles were often different to the vehicle operators.

The main actor involved was a large vehicle manufacturer, that produces cars, vans and trucks. The company had a **strong safety philosophy** with passionate individuals within the company driven to shift towards a more proactive and innovative approach to recalls. Due to the potential severity of this case, the manufacturer chose to employ a third-party consultant to provide expertise and drive increased success.

The main challenge in this recall was **promoting customer engagement** with recall notifications, which the manufacturer tackled by trialling a postcard style communication. The manufacturer also cooperated with the DVSA, DVLA and Traffic Commission Officer (TCO) to **obtain additional contact details** to reach registered operators (as opposed to owners), and achieve **multi-modal communication** using phone calls and text messages

These methods raised the success rate from around 60% after just traditional methods were used, up to 90%. At this point, the manufacturer and external company worked together to chase down individual outstanding vehicles through additional communication efforts. Overall, the recall achieved **1097 out of the 1100 affected vehicles repaired within one year**, an outcome considered incredibly successful considering the factors involved.

7.3. Recall Process Map

The table below provides an overview of the recall process implemented, including steps taken and actors involved. It illustrates the key roles all actors played in the recall process. The manufacturer proactively drove the recall, investing time and resource into employing an external company specialising in recalls, and funding dealership training workshops. Cooperation between the manufacturer, DVSA, DVLA and TCO enabled sharing of contact details to enable targeted and effective communications.

Table 3. Automotive Sector Process Map

Identifying the issue & legal notification	Risk assessment & choice of action	Recall measures		Conclusion & review
Manufacturer	Manufacturer	Manufacturer	Manufacturer	Manufacturer
Regular safety checks conducted at factory.	Central Safety team conduct risk assessment	Contact using postal letters Conducted trial repair to pre-empt issues and provide solutions. Created bespoke training to upskill mechanics	Adapted recall to each case – providing hire vehicles, weekend repairs etc. Weekly monitoring of completed repairs	External company raised success from 65% to 90% Overall only 3 trucks outstanding, 1 exported.
		Dealerships	External Company	
		Upskilled mechanics Shared learnings throughout process using email and online forums	Created additional postal communication – postcard format with recall details Multi-channel reach - Phone calls and texts used where available. Provided additional resource to handle calls and individually track down vehicles.	
		DVSA	DVLA	DVSA and TCO
		Confirm choice of corrective action	Provides contact details	Collected additional contact details through Operator Licenses

The following sections review each stage of the process in detail.

7.4. Issue Identification and Legal Notification

This stage was facilitated through robust processes, but timeliness was limited somewhat by outdated communication methods within the sector.

The manufacturer had **thorough safety processes** in place, with regular safety checks at the main factory in Germany monitoring quality and identifying defects. The manufacturer was able to identify the specific component and was able to quickly ascertain which vehicles would be affected. The manufacturer also had a strong safety philosophy, taking risks seriously and prioritising rapid action when faults were identified.

The sector benefits from a robust legal framework which requires manufacturers to notify the DVSA when incidents are identified. In this case, the manufacturer already had a strong and trusting relationship with the DVSA, which facilitated efficient communication. However, the process was slowed by burdensome form-filling and requirements to physically mail information, which is the norm in this sector.

“It’s massively antiquated, the system for getting information. The amount of forms and information you have to fill in. It would be great to be able to do it online.”

Warranty Manager

7.5. Risk Assessment and Choice of Action

This stage was straightforward due to established and objective decision-making processes

The process of risk assessment was straightforward due to **established processes** in place in the main factory. As usual following incident identification, the primary safety team conducted a **thorough investigation** to assess the risk level and establish recommended measures. This information was then passed through an internal decision-making team who regularly meet to review cases. The team is made up of a variety of staff to ensure

objective decision-making. This team established the risk as severe, requiring rapid action

As noted in the previous section, the legal framework requires a manufacturer to notify the DVSA of this decision, at which point they decide whether they agree with the proposed response. In this case, the risk was clear and the **DVSA agreed a recall was required.**

When deciding the extent of resource to commit to the recall several factors played a role. Senior members of staff were **driven to trial new approaches** to improve recall response, which provided a necessary level of support when making a financial case for the recall. A relatively low number of vehicles were affected enabling a more focused and resource intensive response. In addition to this, the risk was considered particularly severe due to the nature of the trucks, and the team were **driven to avoid the negative repercussions and reputational damage if an incident did occur.**

7.6. Recall Measures Implemented

7.6.1. Employing additional resource with experience and expertise in recalls

The manufacturer employed an external company which specialised in recalls. This provided new ideas and additional resource which were essential to success.

The team felt the nature of the recall warranted additional effort and decided to hire an external company to gain their **expertise and experience of past recalls.** This company suggested trialling new formats of communications, in the form of a postcard style mailout, to replace the traditional letter (see 7.6.2). The company also provided important **additional resource**, enabling the manufacturer to set up a phone line for owners to contact with queries and to book appointments. Towards the end of the recall, the team also put significant effort into contacting the owners of individual outstanding vehicles, through searching for publicly available contact details. In this recall, the additional resource enabled a thorough and intensive response, which was essential for achieving the high response rate within a relatively short timeframe.

7.6.2. Trialling innovative communication methods

The manufacturer trialled a postcard style communication mailout, to replace traditional letters which typically see very low response rates.

This sector benefits from high product traceability; all vehicles must be registered and the DVLA shares these contact details with manufacturers in the case of a recall. However, **issues with this data can limit traceability:** details can be out of date or contain errors; they may be correct for the registered owner, but this owner may differ from the individual actually driving the vehicle meaning engagement is low; and they are typically limited to postal addresses which means communication is restricted to mailouts.

The manufacturer and external company recognised these limitations and trialled a new method of postal communications. They decided to trial a **postcard-style card.** One side showed an image of the vehicle and brand, and the other detailed the action required and provided contact numbers for owners to arrange an appointment. This was intended to make the postcard stand out from other mail and make it easy for owners to quickly establish what the problem was and what action was needed. There was slight initial push back from some senior and finance colleagues on trialling this method, as there was

concern of reputational damage arising from so openly airing the fault. Senior staff members were able to persuade colleagues that the potential risks from inaction, such as reputation and financial loss, outweighed the potential risks of trialling this method.

The manufacturer also worked with the DVLA and TCO to gather additional contact details from vehicle operator licenses. These licenses contained additional contact details for registered operators, including phone numbers as well as addresses. This stage was essential in achieving **targeted multi-modal reach**.

After following traditional procedure, the response rate was around 60%. The postcard and other recall measures increased this to around 90%. The team were able to monitor the response resulting from the postcard as opposed to the letter due to the distinct phone number provided with the postcard.

7.6.3. Streamlining recall process

The manufacturer invested time and resource to ensure the recall ran as smoothly and quickly as possible.

There were several factors which suggested this recall would be particularly difficult from the offset. The repair was complex, requiring specialist tools and high-level mechanics. It also required around three days to complete, a significant amount of time for both dealerships and owners to accommodate. The trucks were also used for work and income generation, which increased the reluctance to bring vehicles in.

The manufacturer went to great lengths to streamline the process as much as possible and reduce burden on the individuals responsible for bringing the truck in for repair. The technical team completed the first repair which enabled them to fully understand the process and **foresee any potential issues**. For example, the team identified a potential risk with a heavy part which required removal and built a bespoke stand to hold that part during the repair and reduce the risk of accidents. They were also able to reassess the skill level required for the repair and establish that although the initial assessment suggested a systems technician was needed, maintenance technicians at the level below would be capable with the correct training. The manufacturer then organised a series of training workshops which technicians could attend for free. The resulting increase in skilled technicians increased dealership capacity for repairs significantly and sped up the overall process. The manufacturer worked hard to ensure dealerships were sharing information and learnings from the repairs during the process. Loan vehicles were also offered out to drivers, and repairs were scheduled over weekends or other low work periods.

7.7. Manufacturer Reflections

The recall was considered extremely successful and proved the importance of a proactive approach, targeted reach and cooperation across actors.

Overall, the recall achieved over a 99% success rate in one year, a feat considered extremely successful for such a complex case. The manufacturer reflected that whilst the external company had played an essential role in this recall due to the novel ideas and extra resource they provided, they now felt better equipped to handle future recalls independently and would not use a similar company in future.

Of the three outstanding repairs, one of the trucks was found to be exported. In this case, the global nature of the company enabled them to trace this vehicle, but this highlighted the need for more work to overcome gaps in traceability arising through export, as well as second-hand sales and recycling. This currently relied on information being shared across the industry, which was not always done thoroughly or efficiently.

The manufacturer felt that **communication and cooperation** across all actors was essential in driving an effective and timely recall. For example, cooperation and shared understanding of the importance of targeted contact details between DVSA, DVLA and TCO enabled timely information sharing, and cooperation across dealerships ensured the recall ran effectively. **Senior buy-in** from the team was also vital, not only in providing support and resource, but also in enhancing perceptions of recalls amongst vehicle owners.

“There’s a lot to be said for [having senior buy in]. People are like, ‘blimey if the technical manager is on the phone, it must be important’ - that’s the key element, people saw that we were taking it seriously and then people’s viewpoint and assessment of it changed.”
Head of Technical and Service Support

This recall marked a change in culture, highlighting the **importance and impact of manufacturers taking more responsibility** as opposed to putting the onus on the consumer to engage and respond to recalls. Streamlining processes and reducing burden on consumers also has the potential to positively impact recall perceptions and drive future engagement in recalls.

7.8. Consumer Perspective

Online community participants reviewed a different, more typical car recall case which used a postal letter to pre-warn owners of a potential issue.

Participants in the online community generally felt that **postal communications were outdated and slow** and thus signalled low importance and urgency. They were unlikely to open letters which could get lost amongst junk mail or forgotten. They felt that in cases of severe risk, additional measures such as newspaper or media communications should also be used.

Consumers supported any measures which **reduce burden** and felt that in risky cases they would expect the vehicle to be collected, rather than risk driving it. Despite concern over the risk involved, consumers also expressed general reluctance in taking a vehicle in for a repair, largely due to the effort and inconvenience of arranging an appointment, taking the vehicle in to be fixed and being without a vehicle for the duration of the appointment.

7.9. DVSA Perspective

The DVSA noted the importance of supporting manufacturers and maximising consumer engagement.

The DVSA reflected that the mindset and culture of the manufacturer is important in driving effective recalls and was important in this case. They felt it was important to build up **good relationships** with manufacturers, some of whom are not fully aware of regulatory

requirements or try to avoid them, to ensure consistent and effective communication. Often these were smaller manufacturers which could lack resource or be more concerned about potential reputational risks and the financial implications of recalls. These manufacturers may also have less experience of recalls and less knowledge of best practice and processes. The DVSA works with these manufacturers to offer advice and monitor processes.

The DVSA raised some suggestions for improvements to the recall process. They felt societies such as the Society of Motor and Manufacturer Trading could play a useful role in encouraging manufacturers to become more proactive in their recall approach. They echoed the manufacturer reflection that consumer engagement was a key barrier to vehicle recalls and felt that more could be done to encourage consumers to respond to notices. This could include making recalls part of the MOT or insurance process, which would incur the consequence of failure if consumers failed to complete the repair. More could also be done to help consumers find out if their vehicle is affected, for example through easy number plate checking systems.

7.10. Learnings from a supplementary case study

One additional interview was conducted to explore a second case study, which addressed the challenge of encouraging vehicle drivers to book and attend repair appointments.

This recall involved a **high-end vehicle manufacturer**. As mentioned, brand reputation and culture can play a significant role in determining the choice and extent of recall action and in this case the brand anticipated consumers to expect high quality service and recall experience.

A known electrical fault had been identified but was considered low risk by the manufacturer, as it caused only a momentary failure of electronics and was unlikely to cause an accident. At this point they took no recall action. An incident occurred in which a driver was involved in a **serious accident** when the failed electrics left the vehicle without lights on a dark road at night. The incident attracted significant media attention.

Following this, evidence was evaluated by the DVSA and a full recall was issued. The repair was small, requiring only access to the passenger footwell to fix. It took less than an hour to fix and did not require technical equipment or specialist mechanics

The manufacturer followed usual recall procedures, sending out a letter detailing the warning signs and contact details. When response plateaued, the manufacturer decided further action was needed. They acknowledged several challenges to this process. The vehicle model was fairly old, meaning that many vehicles were now owned second- or third-hand, and therefore owners were likely to have a less close relationship with dealerships, be less engaged with communication and be more likely to expect faults as part of normal wear and tear. They also knew that vehicle owners in general were reluctant to attend repair appointments, which could be disruptive to daily routines and require waiting in a dealership for an unknown amount of time whilst the repair was completed.

To overcome these challenges, the manufacturer cooperated with retailers to **set up workshops in three large shopping centres** in London, Birmingham and Manchester. Customers in the surrounding areas were recontacted, asked to book an appointment to bring their cars to the centre, and **incentivised with a voucher** to spend in the shopping centre whilst they waited for the repair.

This additional effort increased response rates somewhat, with an intense initial uptake which then dropped off. In total, the recall completed 876 vehicles and achieved a **92.5% customer satisfaction rate**. However, the impact of the workshops alone could not be separated from the additional mail-out campaigns occurring at the same time. Customer feedback was received commenting on the positive experience and pleasant surprise of receiving vouchers, and the positive impact this had on brand perceptions.

However, engagement was still limited. The manufacturer acknowledged that customers were still **unlikely to engage with postal communications**. They felt the over-reliance on mail, which could be dismissed as junk mail, made it difficult to assess whether customers were engaging with the communications and choosing not to respond, or missing the information completely. Recall success could potentially be improved if manufacturers were able to collect additional contact details such as phone numbers and email addresses for customers. They also reflected that this method did not completely overcome the challenge of asking customers to disrupt their routine to book and attend the appointment. The shopping centres were also chosen for logistical reasons, rather than targeting low response areas.

Looking to the future, the automation of cars (and other products) could facilitate recall success. In-car messengers can be utilised to send messages directly to the car and associated smartphone application. This direct contact targets the current vehicle driver and enables instant contact which is almost impossible to miss. The manufacturer also felt that the sector could benefit from joint-up effort across all manufacturers to improve customer education around recalls, boost perceptions and increase awareness of the importance of responding to recall notices.

7.11 Recall Learnings

These case studies revealed several learnings which are relevant across product categories, with some being more relevant for the vehicle sector.

- Product registration significantly improves traceability and contact reach. However, it is important that contact details target the most appropriate person (for example, the actual user of the vehicle) and **enable multi-modal contact**. In the case of the heavy goods vehicle recall detailed earlier, having access to operator licenses provided useful and additional contact details which enabled contact via calls as well as mail and improved the recall outcome. This recall also emphasised the importance of contact details being regularly updated when products change ownership, are exported or destroyed.
- Customer communications should **utilise multiple channels and formats** to maximise consumer engagement. Multiple methods not only enhance reach, but also enhance consumer perception of the importance and urgency of the recall.
- **Cooperation and communication** across actors are essential for an objective and effective recall process. For example, open and timely communication of safety evidence between manufacturers and the DVSA ensures an objective risk assessment and decision for action can be made. Cooperation across manufacturers, and between insurance companies and other actors, could also help boost customer reach and engagement.

- Despite high product value, traceability and risk level in this sector, recall processes see limited success due to the reliance on consumer engagement. Manufacturers and retailers need to assume greater responsibility and **make the process easier** for consumers.
- Efforts are also needed to increase consumer engagement, whether through **education, incentivisation or penalisation**. In the vehicle sector, this could come in the form of education around the dangers for other road users, the provision of incentives to bring vehicles in for repair, or the introduction of penalties through insurance or MOT charges. Similar processes could apply to other product sectors.
- **Incentivisation** may work to encourage consumers to engage with recalls and bring in products for repair or refund, particularly if the incentivisation overcomes another barrier to response (e.g. having nothing to do whilst waiting for a repair).
- **Improving customer experience is** an important part of recall processes. The customer feedback from this case suggests that the effort made by the manufacturer improved experience and ameliorated any potential reduction in brand perceptions caused by the initial safety issue.

8. Case Study: Food

This section details a recall implemented by a small manufacturer in response to a consumer complaint over an allergic reaction arising from a misleading product label. The section reviews in detail the actions taken, actors involved, drivers and barriers of effectiveness and subsequent industry learnings. Overall, it demonstrates the benefit of small businesses with no prior experience creating a recall plan and running a recall rehearsal in advance and then conducting a thorough review following a real recall to facilitate an effective process. It also highlights the important supporting role retailers play in the recall process, suggesting that there may be a need for greater responsibility to be placed on these actors, with clearer requirements specified. Finally, it demonstrates the value of root-cause analysis to ensure the issue is traced back to the source and effectively resolved, as well as providing the opportunity to reveal wider industry learnings to improve product safety.

8.1. Sector Context

Recalls in the food sector most commonly involve allergen risks (whether through mislabelling or contamination) or contamination with non-food elements. Those involving **allergen risks can be fatal and necessitate rapid identification and recall** processes.

Key recall process challenges in this sector were said to be conducting risk assessments, tracing customers, low return rates and difficulty monitoring success.

Risk assessment was considered especially challenging in the food sector. The process of determining the severity of the risk and the extent of products affected could be time and resource intensive. In incidents where a specific ingredient was used across manufacturers and food products, entire complex supply chains could require investigation.

Manufacturers are often able to identify the specific batch of product affected, and detail this in recall notices. However, **traceability of consumers is low**. In some cases, supermarkets collect contact data through loyalty cards. However, it did not appear this data was being commonly used to achieve targeted customer contact within this sector, although details were sometimes used to send blanket recall communications out to all customers

Return rates are also particularly low in this sector, making recall success difficult to measure. Food is often consumed before the consumer becomes aware of a recall or thrown away rather than returned, making it hard to measure how many consumers have seen a recall notice and chosen not to respond.

The size of the manufacturer can influence recall processes and effectiveness. This sector can consist of **very small, local manufacturers with limited or no experience** of recalls and low resource. Supermarkets reported that smaller brands were likely to need more guidance and support during the recall process from themselves and other actors.

8.2. Recall Context

This recall involved a **small manufacturer with no prior experience** of a product recall and less than 10 employees. In 2019, a consumer report identified a problem with one of the manufacturers product ranges. A child with a milk allergy had suffered an **allergic reaction**, despite the product label not mentioning milk as an ingredient.

The Technical Manager at the company had previously worked for a larger manufacturer and had experience in product recalls. On joining the company, she **organised for the small team to create a recall plan and run a practice drill**, with the aim of preparing the team, identifying areas for improvement and enabling them to respond quickly if an issue was to occur.

The company has a **strong relationship with the Food Standards Agency (FSA)** and benefited from their guidance during the recall process.

The main challenge faced during the recall was **coordinating with supermarkets and efficiently removing the product from shelves**. As a result, since the recall the company has worked with supermarkets to identify solutions and **refined their recall plan**.

During the recall the manufacturer had a proactive attitude and was intent on resolving the issue quickly to protect consumers and their reputation. As part of this they carried out a thorough investigation of the issue, **conducting root-cause analysis to identify the underlying source of the problem**. This enabled them to notify FSA of a wider industry problem and **identify a long-term solution for the company** (changing its food labels). They have not experienced another product safety issue since.

8.3. Recall Process Map

The table below provides an overview of the recall process implemented, including steps taken and actors involved. It illustrates that **the manufacturer was the key driving force** during the recall, with guidance and support from FSA and Environmental Health Officer (EHO). Other actors also played important roles. Supermarkets removed the product from shelves, allergy organisations helped publicise the recall notice and their chocolate supplier enabled the manufacturer to identify the source of the product safety issue, leading to a longer-term solution.

The map also highlights that the **key recall measures consisted of notifying supermarkets and investigating the root-cause of the issue** to avoid future problems. This is in contrast to case studies reviewed in other sectors where the main focus has been on consumer traceability and communication. The following sections review each of the stages in more detail, exploring drivers of recall effectiveness and points of difficulty.

Table 4. Food Process Map

Identifying the issue & legal notification	Risk assessment & choice of action	Recall measures			Conclusion & review
Manufacturer	Manufacturer	Manufacturer	Manufacturer	Manufacturer	Manufacturer
Received email from a parent notifying them about their child's allergic reaction	Conducted internal investigation, reviewing production to order to identify possibility of cross-contamination. Identified that production had been run in incorrect order.	Notified supermarkets to recall affected product.	Conducted root-cause analysis and found production order had been incorrect on previous occasions so recalled all product lines.	Through further analysis discovered wider issue. Have since changed product labels and reported industry issue to FSA.	Small team responded quickly having previously run a practice recall. Successfully identified issue and recalled product within a few hours. Demonstrated importance of root-cause analysis to ensure underlying source of the problem is identified and resolved. No further issues have occurred since. Have since refined their recall plan and identified wider industry learnings.
		Supermarkets		Supplier	
		Recalled products and published in-store notice		Provided information on their production processes as part of root-cause analysis	
		Allergy Organisations			
		Published recall notice			
FSA	FSA	FSA & EHO			
Manufacturer notified FSA	Signed-off recall plan	FSA published allergy alert on its website and social media. They provided advice and direction on what to do during recall process.			

8.4. Issue Identification and Legal Notification

The issue was directly reported to the company, with the FSA quickly notified.

The issue was reported to the company via a consumer email. A consumer had suffered a milk allergy despite the product not listing milk as an ingredient. The manufacturer notified the FSA of the incident as soon as a decision over action was reached.

8.5. Risk Assessment and Choice of Action

This stage was straightforward and timely, facilitated by a rehearsed recall process.

Having completed a recall practice run, **the team was able to immediately respond and implement a pre-defined process to investigate the issue.** As a result, the team confirmed that there could be a contamination problem on the same morning that they received the consumer email.

This process began with an examination of production records, which revealed the production line had been run in the incorrect order, interrupting the cleaning process that is essential to avoid contamination. The company also checked CCTV footage to confirm this was the likely cause. At this point the team decided to immediately issue a recall.

8.6. Recall Measures Implemented

8.6.1. Initial product recall

Despite the recall practice run, the company faced challenges during the first stage of recall implementation.

The team immediately notified supermarkets' head offices and directed them to remove the product from sale. This step received a varied response - **some supermarkets were quick to react and block product sales, whilst others took longer or failed to remove products from shelves.** The manufacturer sent drivers to check supermarkets for the product and chased non-responsive head office contacts to ensure they were sending

information to affected stores. They were determined to avoid any more affected products being sold, being concerned about consumer safety and the company's reputation. They felt that some supermarkets could have treated the situation with greater urgency and had better processes in place to more efficiently relay recall information from head office to affected stores.

Overall, coordinating with supermarkets was said to be challenging and complicated. The **lack of consistency across supermarket processes** meant there was no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to completing incident logs. Despite the practice recall, the team was not adequately prepared for this process and found it difficult and time consuming.

The recall was **facilitated by cooperation with the FSA**, who provided guidance to the company, and published an allergy alert on its website and social media. The manufacturer also followed FSA advice and **contacted allergy organisations** to inform them of the issue and ask them to share it with members to increase exposure among relevant consumers.

8.6.2. Root-cause analysis: Phase 1

The manufacturer investigated if the issue could have impacted other product lines, quickly confirming this to be the case

Intent on following FSA's advice and ensuring the issue would not happen again, the manufacturer conducted **root-cause analysis to further examine the factors leading to the problem**. In doing so, they discovered that the same issue with production line order had occurred six times previously. On learning this, they decided to recall all product lines. This further exacerbated the difficulties and inefficiencies of coordinating with supermarkets.

8.6.3. Root-cause analysis: Phase 2

Further analysis successfully revealed a wider industry problem around how products are labelled, resulting in the company changing their product labels

As part of the process, the manufacturer also **sent the product for further analysis**. They discovered the product contained a greater quantity of milk than previously thought. This quantity was far greater than that expected for a product labelled 'may contain milk'.

This discovery **highlighted there were issues further back in the supply chain**, on top of the production line fault within the factory. The manufacturer challenged the company which supplied chocolate for the product to understand the reasons behind the mislabelling. These conversations revealed a larger industry problem in the way products which contain milk are labelled, with 'may' contain milk being used even where quantities are relatively high and demand a more definitive 'does' contain milk label. The manufacturer therefore **contacted the FSA to complain** about the misleading product labels.

To resolve the issue, the manufacturer was unable to change their chocolate supplier, but instead **decided to change the labelling on their product** to accurately reflect the actual quantity of milk and prevent the problem from reoccurring.

8.7. Manufacturer Reflections

The team's prior training and proactivity was felt to facilitate a fast response and resolution, with a thorough process review conducted to identify future learnings

The manufacturer perceived the recall to be a success on many levels. Due to the **proactivity and preparedness of the team**, the issue was identified and acted upon within a few hours. In allergen cases, the timeliness of response is a key metric of success.

They also felt that the root-cause analysis was an extremely worthwhile process, revealing issues in the supply chain which were rectified, and **they have not since had an issue**.

As a result of the poor communication with supermarkets, **the manufacturer has since obtained a more reliable emergency contact for smaller supermarkets**, in the hope that this will speed up the removal of products in future.

They have also **conducted a thorough review and refined their internal recall procedure** based on the insight gained. As part of this, they identified the need to better **define roles** within the team during the recall process, including the nomination of a recall team leader to coordinate activity. To drive greater efficiencies, they will in future ensure **more frequent communication across the team** during the recall process to avoid duplication of tasks.

The manufacturer reflected that the recall process could be further improved if there was a **more standardised process and response across supermarkets**, with clear guidance on the information required in a recall event (including during practice drills).

They also stressed the need for more transparent and honest communication over quantities of potential allergens in products, particularly those such as chocolate which act as a base ingredient and have the potential to impact numerous products down the supply chain. The manufacturer was **hopeful that the FSA would use the learnings from this case to review current legislation** and processes to ensure companies are required to use accurate labelling.

8.8. Consumer Perspective

Consumers voiced the need for businesses to prevent product safety issues from occurring in this sector and suggested ways to overcome low return rates

Consumers were particularly sensitive about food recalls, emphasising the importance of food products being safe at point of sale. **The risk from a product physically entering the body appeared to be taken more seriously than risks in other sectors** which could be avoided or minimised. However, those without allergies noted they were unlikely to be concerned in allergen recalls. Overall, this consumer sensitivity supports the importance of root-cause analysis being conducted in this sector to identify and rectify any wider issues.

Consumers perceived food recalls to **occur relatively frequently, but did not feel they were well communicated** with, for example, notices in stores easily missed. The use of online channels (e.g. social media, retailer website) was seen as a more active method which showed that the risk was being taken seriously, but notices were still quite likely to be missed if consumers did not go online very often or visit the relevant sites.

Consumers welcomed more direct contact, such as emails direct from supermarkets. Although some remarked they did not mind receiving blanket communications if it were important for others' safety, others wanted more targeted communications and to only be notified if they were personally affected. Those who used loyalty cards were open to their data being used for product safety notifications, as long as they were able to clearly specify this on sign-up.

Most consumers said they would be **unlikely to return a food item, due to the low value and inconvenience.** They also felt they were unlikely to see a recall notice until they returned to the store, or happened to notice it online, by which point they would have consumed the food. However, some did suggest they would return a product if they felt it was important in maintaining and improving food standards. **They would welcome an alternative method of acknowledging a recall,** for example, sending a photo of the product or proof of purchase.

8.9. Supermarket Perspective

Supermarkets highlighted the challenge of efficiently communicating recalls to affected stores, as well as low consumer engagement and difficulties measuring success

Supermarket involvement in product recalls is **largely driven by manufacturers,** who determine the response required. Once manufacturers provide a recall notice the **supermarket is responsible for ensuring products are removed from sale as soon as possible.** If the product has not yet reached shelves, the supermarket ensures all products are returned to the manufacturer. To ensure the correct products are removed, supermarkets require detailed information such as batch codes or date ranges. They can also need this information in specific formats. **Supermarkets can play a role in contacting consumers, although the extent of this varies** across retailers and on whether a product is own brand or external.

Supermarkets felt the size of the manufacturer could impact the effectiveness of communications and processes in place. Larger businesses often had more comprehensive processes which streamlined recalls, whereas **small local businesses could be less informed and require more support.** One supermarket was said to often **point these companies towards the PAS 7100 guidelines** and encourage them to conduct root-cause analyses to identify where issues are arising

For own brand products, supermarkets play a much greater role due to having more control over the recall process and greater reputational risk. In these cases, supermarkets work with the supplier to decide on action needed. They still face challenges in consumer engagement, and require extra processes when own-brand products are sold in smaller stores such as garages and newsagents.

Whilst manufacturers are primarily the driving force behind branded products being recalled, **if supermarkets are aware of a product safety risk they may put pressure on manufacturers to take action,** through liaising with Trading Standards or the FSA.

A key challenge supermarkets face is the volume of recall notifications and efficiently communicating these to stores. Often these recalls are generic and might not impact each store. One supermarket had taken steps to overcome this challenge

through adopting automated systems which target recall notifications to the impacted stores.

Supermarkets also acknowledged low consumer engagement with recalls and have made **attempts to ensure those most impacted are made aware of recalls**. For example, by partnering with a UK Allergen charity to facilitate communication of allergen recalls.

Supermarkets highlighted the difficulty of measuring food recall success. Due to low consumer engagement, they **tend to measure success based on the timeliness of product removal, and the absence of customer complaints**. One supermarket interviewed was in the process of establishing formal internal metrics to determine effectiveness.

8.10. Recall Learnings

This case study revealed several learnings, some of which are particularly beneficial for smaller manufacturers or sector specific. There are also opportunities for other product categories to draw learnings from the food sector:

- Similar to other cases, it demonstrates the importance of companies having a **proactive, safety-first mindset** to drive a fast recall response and go beyond statutory requirements (e.g. chasing supermarkets, conducting root-cause analysis), suggesting the recall system could be more effective with greater statutory requirements in place.
- It suggests it may be beneficial for smaller companies with less experience and resource to **hire someone with recall expertise** to guide them in creating a recall plan. It could also be valuable, particularly for smaller companies, to include examples of effective recall plans within the PAS 7100 guidelines that reflect the different resource and capabilities of small, medium and large organisations.
- In particular, it shows the value of companies with no prior experience **conducting a practice recall to test the robustness of the plan and prepare the team** to respond quickly and iron out potential problems.
- Having identified opportunities for improvement, this recall highlights the benefit of companies conducting a comprehensive **post-recall evaluation and using learnings to update their recall plan**.
- Recall learnings revealed the importance of teams **defining internal recall roles, nominating a leader and ensuring frequent communication** to avoid duplication.
- It highlights again the **importance of collaboration with other actors** to effectively execute a recall, such as the FSA, supermarkets and allergen organisations. That said, the recall also supports the need for other actors to have more responsibility, with clearer requirements communicated (e.g. the speed of removing products from shelf).
- This case clearly demonstrates the **value of root-cause analysis**. As well as ensuring the prevention of future problems for the individual manufacturer, it shows there is opportunity for regulatory bodies to use these learnings to review regulations and resolve wider product safety issues. Whilst root-cause analysis is

encouraged in the food sector by the FSA, findings suggest it may be a valuable addition to PAS 7100 and could be championed by OPSS and Trading Standards.

- It suggests **for categories where return rates are particularly low, it may be worth considering alternative measures of success**, such as speed of manufacturer and supermarket response rate, or the receipt of consumer photos of the product or receipt to acknowledge that they are aware and have taken action.
- For the food sector, there may be an **opportunity to standardise recall processes across supermarkets**, such as forms to be completed by manufacturers, to reduce admin and improve the speed of response.
- It also suggests that within this sector supermarkets could be encouraged to implement **more targeted communication strategies**, for example, using loyalty cards or specific channels for those with allergens, to ensure consumers are not overloaded with recalls and take those they do see seriously.

9. Case Study: Online Marketplaces

Unlike the examples detailed earlier in this report, the research into this sector did not focus on a specific recall case, but instead gathered insight into challenges and best practice. This sector has the potential to achieve almost complete product traceability, with marketplaces having access to buyer and seller contact details. Online marketplaces tended to focus on timely removal of recalled products, but beyond this did not play a significant role in recall processes. A conversation is arising in this sector around whether marketplaces should be taking more responsibility.

9.1. Sector Context

Online marketplaces cover different purchasing models and host a variety of products across sectors. A marketplace may sell own-brand products, third-party products from retailers or manufacturers within or outside of the UK and second-hand sales listed by consumers. Most online marketplaces clearly label the type of product and where it originates from, but there is some concern that consumers are unaware of the different models and the implications on product safety.

Online marketplaces are a relatively new and rapidly expanding sector and occupy a unique niche in the market. Marketplaces play a unique role in the product safety system, in that they **connect buyers and sellers**, but may not take ownership or responsibility for the safety of the products on sale. The marketplace **holds contact details for the buyers and sellers**, and traceability is therefore high, with the marketplace theoretically having the ability to contact all involved through a variety of channels (for example through in-site messaging, emails, mailouts, phone calls or texts).

Sales from outside the UK, raise the risk of unsafe products, as the UK Trading Standards have less investigative and enforcement powers over these sellers. **Second-hand** products can also pose greater risks, as they may be listed without sellers being aware of issues or without safety information. **Counterfeit** products are also more likely to surface online, and consumers may be unaware they are not purchasing the registered brand or be unaware of the risk involved with these products. Smaller and lesser-known manufacturers are also more frequent on these sites. These companies can be less concerned about brand reputation and may not follow as stringent safety processes.

A conversation is arising in this emerging sector over the **level of responsibility** marketplaces should hold for product safety. Currently, marketplaces are legally required to remove products from sale once notified of fault. However, there is a lack of understanding as to the extent to which they are required to contact buyers or take a lead on encouraging the return of products. It is clear that legal responsibility lies with the product seller, who is encouraged to contact the buyer to arrange a refund or return, but this is not actively enforced and can vary dependent on the seller.

Where marketplaces sell own brand products, they do take on full responsibility for product recalls. Marketplaces are able to contact buyers through in-site messaging or using other contact details provided. They can send information, pre-paid return packaging, and

incentives direct to individuals homes. They also have the ability to proactively refund buyers.

9.2. Recall Process Map

The table below provides an overview of the recall process implemented, including steps taken and actors involved in the average recall case. It illustrates the legal responsibility of marketplaces to remove unsafe products and the responsibility on product sellers to notify buyers.

Table 5. Online Marketplaces Process Map

Identifying the issue & legal notification	Risk assessment & choice of action	Recall measures		Conclusion & review
Online Marketplace	Online Marketplace	Online Marketplace	Online Marketplace	Online Marketplace
Proactive monitoring of recall databases and consumer reviews	Choice of action determined by recall notification	Legally required to remove products once they become aware of issue.	Contact sellers to notify them of product safety issues. Can block sellers or brands. Can contact buyers in some circumstances.	Lack of clarity around marketplaces' legal responsibility to facilitate recall of products. Success measured in timely removal of products from marketplace and number of unsafe products blocked.
Seller	Seller		Seller*	
Usual product safety checks	Creates safety recall notification detailing action needed, creates legal notification and logs on safety database		Can work with online marketplaces to contact buyers and facilitate return of product	
Buyer	PAP	OPSS	Trading Standards	
Marketplace users can report product issues	PAP channel product reports from multiple sources to marketplaces which assists rapid identification and removal of affected products.	OPSS lacks enforcement powers over non-EU sellers and over marketplaces.	Can work with marketplaces (e.g. marketplaces block sellers until they respond to communication)	* The seller might be the manufacturer, or a retailer or individual selling the product

9.4. Issue Identification and Legal Notification

This stage is driven by existing recall notifications on product databases and is limited by unclear and vague detail.

The legal framework in place requires online marketplaces to remove products when they become aware of a safety issue.

Marketplaces have **tools and algorithms** in place to monitor safety databases, customer product reviews and other sources, to identify issues. Marketplaces consider these largely effective, with one marketplace citing that around four million product listings were blocked annually. The Global partnerships and effective **information sharing** also enable rapid identification of issues arising in other markets which might impact UK buyers (for example, a US produced product could be shipped to the UK or sold on by a consumer on a UK site). **Strong relationships** with Primary Authority Partnerships also facilitate communication between marketplaces and UK Trading Standards.

Marketplaces expressed several challenges with the identification and monitoring of product issues. Marketplaces do not always have physical visibility of products sold on the site, so must rely on sellers providing accurate and honest detail over safety compliance. A major issue was that **recall notifications posted on databases lacked sufficient detail** to assess which products were affected. This meant marketplaces may not be able to identify and remove all affected products. Additionally, in the interests of customer safety, they could be forced to remove all potentially affected products, which they felt negatively

impacted consumer perceptions of recalls. Ideally marketplaces would have specific brand and batch numbers for affected products.

*“We can be dealing with 500 different surveillance authorities, each with different requirements. Ideally we would have it down to the serial number of the specific product”
Online Marketplace*

9.5. Risk Assessment and Choice of Action

This stage is largely decided prior to marketplace involvement and inhibited by a lack of clarity in published recall notifications. Individual marketplace attitude can influence the extent of action taken.

The risk assessment and choice of action is largely decided prior to marketplace involvement. Product safety notifications, logged on databases by manufacturers or regulatory bodies, detail the safety issue and the action required.

Marketplaces do have some influence over the extent of action, with some choosing to act cautiously in the best interests of the consumer and remove all potentially affected products (e.g. in one case a marketplace removed non-branded teddy bears which resembled the teddy in a recall notification photograph). Many marketplaces have signed up to the **voluntary EU Product Safety Pledge**⁸. This pledge goes beyond legal responsibility and asks online marketplaces to commit to timely product removal, clear reporting systems, seller education and proactively taking measures to avoid dangerous product listings amongst other targets

Marketplaces provide information to product sellers, informing them that products have been removed and providing detail on the safety issue. Some have put effort into improving this process by, for example, providing detail in the preferred language of the seller rather than just English. Marketplaces perceived most sellers to be honest and unaware of safety issues, rather than purposefully listing unsafe products. They felt notifying and educating sellers on product safety would over time work to improve knowledge and overall standards. One marketplace had seen around a million fewer blocked listings over the previous year, and believed seller education played a role in this decline. Marketplaces can go further and block a seller completely if they fail to respond to communications or continuously attempt to list unsafe products. Sellers are encouraged to contact buyers to inform them of the issue and organise a refund or return, but this is not enforced.

*“We do have the ability to reach out to 100% of our customers through purchase history, but the real challenge is ensuring consumers are reading messages and paying attention”
Online Marketplace*

Marketplaces did not see it as part of their role to get heavily involved in the recall process e.g. by contacting buyers to inform them of recalled products. They felt the responsibility for this should lie with manufacturers to ensure consumers are aware of product recalls, regardless of where the products are sold. They were also wary to over-contact buyers and wary that this would damage the reputation of recalls and of their site. Any one

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/product-safety-and-requirements/product-safety/product-safety-pledge_en

marketplace is likely only responsible for a small portion of the product sales across all retailers and online sites, and marketplaces felt that it may be confusing to consumers to have inconsistent messaging or approaches to recalls from across different platforms.

9.6. Examples of Good Practice

Examples of good practice highlight the role online marketplaces can play in facilitating product recalls. For example:

- Online marketplaces have **collaborated with manufacturers** to better identify affected products on the site (e.g. working with car manufacturers to identify the specific batches affected). Manufacturer and retail brands have also worked with marketplaces to add resource to platform sweeps.
- In some cases, marketplaces have **collaborated with consumer facing bodies** and shared contact details to enable direct buyer contact.
- Marketplaces have invested in **safety teams** and **algorithms** to improve automated monitoring and blocking of seller listings and identifying affected products. Marketplaces can identify products by photo alone when there are no further details available.

Insight from own-brand recalls on online marketplaces reveal the potential reach online marketplaces can achieve

- An **own-brand** powerbank identified as a fire risk was immediately removed from sale. All buyers were contacted and sent pre-paid packaging to return the item. This achieved a 70% return rate.

9.7. Consumer Perspective

Consumers in the online community were not directly asked to comment on online marketplace recalls. However, in general consumers expected products sold on online marketplaces to meet the same product safety standards as regular online retailers, particularly branded or new items. Some consumers did express the view that they would treat second-hand products (including those bought on online marketplaces) with caution and not hold these to the same standards as new products. However, many did still feel that recall efforts should aim to reach all product owners regardless of how a product was purchased. They did not directly comment on the role online marketplaces should play in this process but seemed open to the idea of being contacted by a marketplace as they would a traditional retailer, particularly for high risk products that they had purchased.

9.8. Consumer Body Perspective

Consumer bodies felt that online marketplaces could play a greater role in product recalls.

Regulators and consumer bodies believe **marketplaces could be doing more** to ensure product safety standards are being upheld. Investigations have consistently found unsafe products for sale, despite marketplace assurance that products are removed within two days of notification (the legal deadline for removal) if not before. These products were listed with no reference or warning label around product safety.

The process through which consumers could **report issues** was flawed and lacked clear product safety-related reporting criteria. Investigations also suggested that reports made by consumers did not receive timely responses, whereas those made by the consumer body did. This suggests a lack of standardisation in approaches to handling safety reports.

Consumer groups suggested that consumers were largely unaware that products for sale on online marketplaces may not have undergone the same robust safety checks as those for sale in brick-and-mortar stores and that online marketplaces should be doing more to ensure consumer safety. They were of the view that the unique placement of online marketplaces, and the role they play in connecting sellers and buyers, requires them to play a greater role in the product safety and recall system. The ability to contact both sellers and buyers puts the marketplace in an influential position, both to discourage and remove listings of unsafe products, and to promote awareness and encourage engagement from buyers when recalls are underway.

“It’s the marketplace that is best placed to prevent issues arising in the first place and then to resolve them when they do. They’re the only party in that transaction process that can see the process from start to finish.” Consumer Body

9.10. Sector Learnings

Online marketplaces are rapidly proliferating and cover all product types discussed in the earlier case studies. Learnings from this sector are applicable across categories and are important to consider when contemplating future recall guidance.

- Recall notifications on product safety databases would benefit **from clearer and more specific product descriptions**. This would enable more targeted removal of affected products and reduce the risk of unidentified products remaining on sale.
- **Proactive monitoring** is important to reduce the likelihood of unsafe products making it to the site and into consumer hands – and is especially important for online retailers given the breadth of sellers they host. The extent to which this occurs is largely invisible at present, although some marketplaces are making moves to increase transparency over the number of blocked and removed listings.
- The new digital infrastructure and challenges presented by sales through online marketplaces call for **clear guidance** on the roles and responsibilities of marketplaces in relation to their sellers.
- Given what is already known about the relative lack of response to recall events by small companies, and the relative power of the online marketplaces in terms of reach and access to customer data, **greater involvement by marketplaces to contact buyers** could considerably boost the effectiveness of recalls.
- Marketplaces also highlight the need for a **consistent and joined-up approach** across all bodies selling affected products to reduce consumer confusion and maintain positive perceptions.
- Online marketplaces also highlighted a general reluctance to **over-load consumers with recall communications**, as was also seen in other sectors. It was felt that excessive recalls diluted the perceived severity and importance and led to lower engagement. This stresses the importance of proactive measures to reduce the number of recalls occurring and targeted communications.

10. Learnings and future considerations

This section outlines the cross-category learnings identified from the in-depth case studies reviewed. It highlights the predominant drivers of recall effectiveness, which were businesses having a proactive safety-first attitude, access to POS information, the implementation of an innovative multi-channel communication campaign, collaboration with other actors, effective practice-drills, the use of root-cause analysis and greater leverage of digital solutions. This section also highlights the ongoing tensions that will need to be addressed to improve recall effectiveness, such as uncertainty around roles and accountability beyond the manufacturer and the interpretation of GDPR, as well as ongoing challenges around product traceability, consumer engagement, measuring strategy effectiveness and defining success. The section concludes with guidance and considerations for the future to improve the effectiveness of the product recall and corrective action process.

10.1 Universal learnings to improve recall effectiveness

Across the recall cases reviewed, several themes emerged that highlight the drivers of recall effectiveness, as well as ongoing tensions that currently hamper effectiveness. These learnings are universal, meaning they are applicable across product categories.

10.1.1. Drivers of effectiveness

- **Proactive, safety-first business attitude:** The case studies highlighted the benefit of the main actors involved having a strong product-safety ethic and proactive mindset, with this being a key driving force for recall effectiveness. Consumer feedback also supports the brand benefits of acting responsibly, countering perceptions and concerns that recalls will damage a brand.
- **Access to POS information:** For products that are not registered, the case studies showed the importance of POS for collecting customer contact information to enable high product and consumer traceability. The increase in online sales was beneficial for this reason, as consumers usually must provide contact details for payment and delivery.
- **Multi-channel communication campaign:** Case studies demonstrated the importance of implementing a multi-channel communication campaign, using a mix of traditional, in-person and digital communication strategies to achieve maximum exposure.
- **Innovative approach:** Case studies exemplified the benefits of using new approaches to increase recall effectiveness, such as social media, postcards and bank details to reach consumers, setting up corrective action workshops in supermarket carparks and providing pre-paid return packaging to reduce barriers to recall engagement.
- **Collaboration with other actors:** The case studies also illustrated the benefit of establishing a trusted relationship with Trading Standards to facilitate a more effective, experimental recall approach and the importance of collaborating with

other relevant actors, such as, banks, DVLA and fire service to improve consumer traceability and awareness.

- **Root-cause analysis:** The food recall demonstrated the importance of conducting root-cause analysis to ensure the issue is traced back to the source and effectively resolved, particularly for recalls involving complex supply chains. It also showed there is opportunity for regulatory bodies to use the learnings from this analysis to review legislation and address wider product safety issues. Whilst root-cause analysis is encouraged in the food sector by the FSA, findings suggest it may be a valuable addition to PAS 7100 and could be championed by OPSS and Trading Standards. A similar process could be useful, for example, for electrical product and domestic appliances, where the same base part may be used across brands or models.
- **Recall rehearsal:** The food recall case study also highlighted the benefit of smaller companies creating a recall plan and conducting a rehearsal to prepare teams with no prior experience to respond quickly and effectively during a real recall.
- **Leveraging new technology:** Case studies suggest the development of new technologies, such as 'smart' internet-connected cars and personal appliances, is likely to provide opportunities to improve product traceability and recall. Online marketplaces also illustrate the benefit of sophisticated algorithms in efficiently identifying and removing affected products.

10.1.2. Ongoing tensions

- **Roles and accountability beyond manufacturer:** Case studies highlighted the need for greater clarity around the roles and responsibilities of relevant actors beyond the manufacturer, particularly in relation to those who can support customer traceability (e.g. banks, insurance companies), whether online marketplaces have a responsibility for third-party products and the role of OPSS in enforcing effective recall action and the involvement of other actors.
- **Product traceability:** This continues to be a key ongoing challenge that needs to be addressed to improve recall rates, especially in relation to second-hand products, with strategies needed to improve POS data, product registration, data transference when a product changes owner and the ability for online marketplaces to identify affected products.
- **Data protection vs product safety:** More clarity is needed from the ICO and OPSS on the tensions between product safety and data protection, including guidance on how to interpret GDPR requirements in the context of a recall, how to determine proportionality (in terms of ensuring the optimal balance between data protection and product safety and evidencing of the necessity of actions taken, which is needed to meet GDPR requirements) and how long customer data can be held, with examples of the types of evidence that can demonstrate business accountability.
- **Consumer engagement and incentivisation:** Improving recall engagement among consumers continues to be a challenge, with question marks around how to incentivise action without falling into the category of 'marketing', how much

responsibility should be placed or removed from customers and how to increase awareness whilst avoiding white-noise.

- **Measuring the effectiveness of recall strategies:** Whilst the case studies reviewed involved innovative approaches, greater experimentation and systematic A/B testing of different approaches in the context of an actual recall event could help to identify which channels and messages are more effective at triggering consumer engagement and therefore help develop a firmer evidence base for future action. Manufacturers could benefit from guidance on how to achieve this.
- **Defining success:** Whilst contextual factors have a strong influence on recall effectiveness, guidance could benefit from loose parameters or examples of effective recalls to help set expectations around what success looks like and the importance of taking multiple steps to maximise recall outcomes.
- **Multiple variables:** Recalls are case-specific and must be assessed as such, with no one approach fitting all recall cases. The recalls in this report all demonstrate very different approaches, involving different challenges and requiring different solutions. Guidance over recalls needs to acknowledge this and explore how best to incorporate this need for flexibility.

10.2 Future considerations

Research learnings suggest the following guidance could help to improve the effectiveness of the product recall and corrective action process in the future and would be worth considering integrating into any revision of PAS 7100 guidance:

- Clarify the **roles and responsibilities** of OPSS, banks, online marketplaces and consumers
- Promote the **brand benefits** of businesses acting responsibly (and consequences of not doing so)
- Provide guidance on the **use and retention of customer data** for product safety purposes.
- Encourage **multi-channel recall measures and collaboration** across actors
- Encourage **systematic experimentation** to provide more guidance on effective communication
- Provide examples of successful recall plans based on a range of organisation sizes and encourage and support smaller businesses in running **product recall practice-drills**
- Provide parameters or examples to help **define success**
- Establish **root-cause analysis** as a formal stage of the product recall process
- Increase awareness of **best-practice recall cases** and provide **guidance tailored to different contexts** (e.g. product type, age, severity of risk, consumer profile, size of organisation)

Annex A: Recall Process Maps – Accessible Version

The below sections detail the process for each of the recalls detailed in the main body of the report. Key points and actors involved are summarised for each recall. This includes the identification of the issue, the legal notification, the risk assessment, the choice of action, the recall measures taken by whom, and the conclusion and review.

Recall Process Map – Small Electrical Item

Identifying the issue & legal notification

The retailer identified a product issue via customer feedback in-store and on social media. The in-store team reported the issue after the first incident. The product was removed from sale following the second report.

The retailer notified the supplier, a Chinese product manufacturer, and the Primary Authority Partnership.

Risk assessment & choice of action

The retailer conducted internal lab testing on existing stock to identify the source of the problem and the level of risk. The risk assessment team briefed the internal product safety committee on their findings and decided to initiate a full product recall.

The retailer sought input from Electrical Safety First on the risks associated with this type of product

The Primary Authority Partnership reviewed the risk assessment and signed-off the recall plan.

Recall measures

The retailer started by tracing customers through loyalty card data, and soon after launched a two-wave press campaign across national and regional press. All communications encouraged consumers to stop using the produce, return the product and call the dedicated phone line. Return rates were monitored throughout the course of the recall.

The retailer also launched a sponsored social media campaign. The Fire Services reposted the social media recall notice on their own social media channels.

They then emailed all customers within their customer database, including those who had not given prior consent. Before they did this, the retailer consulted a legal advisor, who provided advice on contacting customers without their consent.

The Primary Authority Partnership published the recall notice, monitored response rates provided by retailer and discussed changes to communication strategy with the retailer.

Conclusion & review

The recall achieved a 95% product return rate. Overall, the strategy was seen as proportionate to the level of risk, with positive brand impact experienced. This approach was justified given the severity of the case, but the retailer would not advise this being the go-to strategy. The retailer has repeated the strategy but received more customer complaints, which highlights the tension between data protection and protect safety. The retailer is now focused on improving customer traceability and measuring the effectiveness of communications.

Recall Process Map – Large Domestic Appliance

Identifying the issue & legal notification

The retailer identified the issue through regular monitoring of customer reports and product repair data. The supplier then identified and confirmed the product fault and specified the batch number.

Risk assessment & choice of action

The retailer conducted a laboratory analysis of the issue to identify the specific fault. They decided to initiate corrective action to replace the faulty part and sent out communications to inform consumers to stop using the product.

Trading Standards signed off the retailer's action plan.

Recall measures

As the product had high traceability, the retailer focused on direct versus mass messaging to consumers. They initiated a staged approach with three variations, sending emails, three versions of a letter, text messages and using delivery drivers to visit consumer homes. The retailer had previously sought legal counsel on involving banks in product recalls and engaged with fifteen banks directly, and then via Trading Standards, to identify remaining customers using payment data.

Trading Standards engaged with 9 banks requesting action under General Product Safety Regulations. They then passed legal counsel on to the Office for Product and Safety Standards for further investigation

There was a mixed response from the banks. 6 contacted customers. 3 claimed to be unable to. 6 did not respond.

Conclusion & review

Overall, the recall had around a 98% success overall. There are some challenges around further use of bank data due to changes in data storage laws

Recall Process Map – Automotive Sector

Identifying the issue & legal notification

The manufacturer identified an issue through regular safety checks conducted at the main factory.

Risk assessment & choice of action

The central safety team at the manufacturer conducted a thorough risk assessment. The Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency confirmed choice of corrective action.

Recall measures

The manufacturer contacted consumers using postal letters. They also conducted a trial repair to pre-empt issues and provide solutions. The manufacturer and dealership created bespoke training to upskill mechanics to complete the repair.

The manufacturer adapted the recall to each case to overcome specific challenges. For example, providing hire vehicles or weekend repairs. They also monitored completed repairs weekly.

Dealerships signed up to training to upskilled mechanics and shared learnings with other dealerships throughout the process using email and online forums

The manufacturer hired an external company with experience in product recalls. They created additional postal communications in a postcard format with recall details. They also enabled multi-channel reach by providing additional resource and collecting additional contact details. They used phone calls and texts where available, rather than just letters.

The retailer and DVSA worked with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency to collect additional contact details. They also worked with the Traffic Commissioners Officer to collect additional contact details through Operator Licenses, which detail the actual users of the vehicle.

Conclusion & review

The external company raised the recall success from 65% to 90%. Overall, only 3 trucks were outstanding after one year, 1 of these had been exported.

Recall Process Map – Food

Identifying the issue & legal notification

The issue was identified when the manufacturer received an email from a parent notifying them about their child's allergic reaction. The manufacturer then notified the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

Risk assessment & choice of action

The manufacturer then conducted an internal investigation, reviewing production in order to identify possibility of cross-contamination. They identified that production had been run in the incorrect order. They decided to issue a recall. The Food Standards Agency signed off the recall plan.

Recall measures

The manufacturer notified supermarkets to recall the affected product.

They then conducted a root-cause analysis and found production order had been incorrect on previous occasions as well. They then recalled all product lines. The supplier of the affected product provided information on their production processes as part of the root-cause analysis

Through further analysis the manufacturer also discovered a wider issue in the way products were labelled. They have since changed product labels and reported the industry issue to the Food Standards Agency.

Supermarkets recalled all products and published in-store notice.

Allergy Organisations also published recall notice on their own channels.

The Food Standards Agency published the allergy alert on its website and social media. They, and the Environmental Health Office provided advice and direction on what to do during a recall process.

Conclusion & review

The small team at the manufacturer had previously run a practice recall, which helped this recall run more smoothly. They successfully identified the issue and recalled the product within a few hours. This demonstrated the importance of root-cause analysis to ensure the underlying source of the problem is identified and resolved. No further issues have occurred since. The retailer has since refined their recall plan and identified wider industry learnings.

Recall Process Map – Online Marketplaces

Identifying the issue & legal notification

Online Marketplaces proactively monitor recall databases and consumer reviews

Manufacturers conduct their usual product safety checks and notify marketplaces if issues are found.

Buyers can report product issues to the seller or marketplace.

Primary Authority Partnerships channel product reports from multiple sources to marketplaces which assists rapid identification and removal of affected products.

Risk assessment & choice of action

The choice of action is determined by recall notification issued by the manufacturer or trading standards. The manufacturer creates the safety recall notification detailing the action needed, creates legal notification and logs the product on the relevant safety database.

Recall measures

Online Marketplaces contact sellers to notify them of product safety issues. They can block sellers or brands completely. They can also contact buyers in some circumstances (for example, for own-brand products).

The seller, who might be the manufacturer, or a retailer or individual selling the product, can work with online marketplaces to contact buyers and facilitate the return of product.

The Office for Product and Safety Standards does not have enforcement powers over non-EU sellers.

Trading Standards can work with marketplaces (for example, marketplaces can block sellers until they respond to communication with Trading Standards).

Conclusion & review

There is a lack of clarity around marketplaces' legal responsibility to facilitate the recall of products. Success is measured by the timely removal of products from sale on the marketplace and by the number of unsafe products blocked before being listed.

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Office for Product Safety and Standards

Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

4th Floor, Cannon House, 18 The Priory Queensway, Birmingham B4 6BS

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/office-for-product-safety-and-standards>