

Official Note of the 5th Meeting of the Working Group on Product Recalls and Safety – Thursday 22nd June 2017

This was the fifth meeting of the Working Group on Product Recalls and Safety, under the Chairmanship of Neil Gibbins.

Attendees:

Neil Gibbins, Chief Executive of the Institution of Fire Engineers and former Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Devon and Somerset (**Chair**)

Martyn Allen, Electrical Safety First, (ESF)

Tom Ballard, Citizens Advice (CA)

Steve Brunige, British Standards Institution, (BSI)

Joanne Collins, British Retail Consortium (BRC)

John Leadley, Baker McKenzie LLP (B&M)

Sian Lewis, Association of Manufacturers of Domestic Appliances (AMDEA)

Leon Livermore, Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI)

Keiran Millard, British Standards Institution, (BSI)

Wendy Phillips, British Toy and Hobby Association (BTHA)

Guy Pratt, Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers (ACTSO)

Charlie Pugsley, the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA)

Daniel Walker-Nolan, Citizens Advice (CA)

Melanie Wiseman, Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT)

Apologies:

Jonathan O'Neill, Fire Protection Association (FPA)

Professor G.J.Rodgers, Brunel University London (BUL)

Errol Taylor, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA)

Meeting content

The Chair of the Working Group, Neil Gibbins, opened the meeting by thanking everyone for their attendance, at short notice. He outlined the purpose of the meeting: to consider whether, in light of the tragic events at Grenfell Tower, the Group had any further thoughts which they wished to see reflected in their report to the Minister.

The Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Corporate Responsibility attended the first hour of the meeting. She also expressed her gratitude to attendees, including for the significant amount of hard work and collaboration that has gone into producing the Working Group report. The Minister confirmed she had intended to publish the report had the General Election not been called preventing its publication at that point.

Margot James emphasised that Government is taking action in response to Grenfell across a number of policy areas and is keen to consider what more can be done, including if it is confirmed that the fire was started by a fridge freezer¹. BEIS officials are already working with some members of the Working Group to ensure that manufacturers are ready to respond appropriately and quickly. She reiterated that the next step will be for members of the Working Group to revisit the report and consider whether the underlying thinking and recommendations should be enhanced, or changed following the Grenfell fire. The Minister was keen to receive an update to the report as soon as possible, and committed to publishing the report on the gov.uk website.

There was general consensus that the report had focussed on the most pertinent issues. The key messages of: manufacturing products that remained safe throughout their life; the need for manufacturers to be proactive in monitoring goods on the market and identifying potential safety issues; and the need for clear advice to consumers about what to do with a product with a fire safety risk, remained valid and relevant.

The Group reiterated the importance of developing central technical and scientific capability to provide technical support for regulators, manufacturers and enforcers, and also the need to provide adequate resource to ensure effective market surveillance arrangements both now and after we leave the EU. There were also other areas which the Group felt it would like to flag up for further consideration. These included:

- **Consideration of taking a wider view to risk profiling.** It was suggested that factors other than the risk posed by the item should be considered when agreeing the appropriate approach to dealing with a potentially unsafe product. For instance, where it was known that a consumer was particularly vulnerable, or the risk extended significantly beyond the individual user (particularly relevant in relation to products with a safety risk in multi-occupancy buildings). However, it was recognised that it would be difficult for the economic operators to have access to information about consumers which may impact on risk profiling other than to identify their residence in high rise/multiple occupancy buildings.
- **Consideration of the second hand and refurbished goods market.** These types of goods also pose a particular risk and the Group felt that action should be taken to gain a better understanding of the market and risks related to the resale of older or repaired products to help determine what proactive measures could be taken to reduce risk.

¹ At the time of the meeting, the cause of the fire at Grenfell Tower was unknown.

- **The challenge to continuously review and keep standards** (against which most manufacturers construct and test their products) **up to date** and reflect the latest developments in technology, consumer preference/behaviour, and scientific and technical understanding of hazards, and to proactively develop standards to continuously improve product safety. CFOA gave a particular example in relation to the updating of the standard relating to fridge freezers.
- **The growing trade in counterfeit goods**, which poses potential particular problems in relation to product safety.
- **The challenge of understanding and predicting consumer behaviour in the design of safer products.**
- **The important role of the insurance sector in helping to identify potential safety issues.** The Group were keen to see the insurance sector playing a more proactive role in sharing data with manufacturers on fires caused by domestic appliances so that manufacturers could spot trends and identify potentially unsafe products.
- **The need for better data and data sharing.** The group felt that sources of information such as the hospital accident statistics needed to be reinstated.

The Minister invited individual members of the Group to put forward any further thoughts and recommendations. It was agreed that the Chair would reflect on the discussions and resubmit the final report to the Minister.

Demonstration of the Enhanced Recalls Information on gov.uk

Lynn Faulds Woods recommended in her report in February 2016 that there should be an official trusted website of product recalls - for business and the public. An interim solution, providing links to significant sources of information on product recalls, was made available on GOV.UK in October 2016. Work has continued to develop the site and the Working Group was given a demonstration of the enhanced site which was intended to be uploaded as soon as possible.

The Group welcomed the enhanced site as a really positive step forward and agreed to give feedback to the web developers. Members noted that it is important that consumers are clear about sources of recall information.

Action planning

There was a brief discussion on action planning to ensure speeding up of progress on existing work streams, and that they are in line with any learning from Grenfell, particularly development of corrective action and recall standard. The standard is being drafted in two chapters – information aimed at manufacturers and retailers, and information aimed at the enforcement community. CTSI and ACTSO offered their assistance in drafting the content relevant to enforcement.

Agreed actions:

- Neil Gibbins to reflect on discussions and provide an updated narrative to the Minister.
- The Group to provide feedback to BEIS Comms regarding new website aimed at providing accurate and up to date information about recalls in a more interactive and user friendly way.
- Members of the Group to help publicise information sources on product recall including the enhanced website <https://productrecall.campaign.gov.uk/>.
- A meeting of the BSI Steering Group to discuss an initial draft of the standard on corrective action and recalls on 28th July with a view to putting the standard out for publication consultation by the end of September.
- Explore the potential for financial institutions to share data on customer purchases to assist in location of product subject to recall.