Office for Product Safety & Standards

Product Safety and Industry Research

Wave 3 findings

September 2025

This report was commissioned by the Office for Product Safety and Standards and prepared by IFF Research.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and research participants. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS), the Department for Business and Trade (DBT), or government policy.

OPSS continues to monitor any regulatory divergence between the UK and EU regarding product safety regulations and seeks to mitigate any associated risk while continuing to develop the UK's independent and internationally recognised product safety framework.

OPSS recognises the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies and is committed to supporting regulators and businesses in understanding and addressing its implications for product safety.

OPSS regularly reviews stakeholder feedback and continues to develop and refine its guidance materials to support businesses across sectors and enhance collaborative engagement.

OPSS continues to work closely with the industry and enforcement authorities to monitor supply chain integrity and mitigate risk associated with counterfeit goods. OPSS also continues to monitor market conditions and supports businesses in maintaining product safety and regulatory compliance during periods of economic fluctuations.

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Background

One of the goals of the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) is to strengthen the evidence base for the development of product safety policy, delivery, and enforcement. OPSS launched its Strategic Research Programme in May 2018 and its strategy for strengthening product safety[1] in August of the same year. The strategy was updated in 2022[2].

Central to both of these initiatives is a suite of research projects to build on OPSS' understanding of the actors within the system; their attitudes, current behaviours, and how Government may seek to impact those behaviours.

This report summarises the third wave of research fieldwork, carried out in 2024 and 2025. The first wave was carried out from 2019 to 2020 and the second in 2022. Where relevant, this report compares against findings from both waves. Full results from the 2022 study can be found in the published report[3], along with the first wave of research[4].

The research was commissioned by the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) and carried out by IFF Research, an independent research company.

This was a mixed-method research project comprising of a qualitative and quantitative research strand. The quantitative research strand consisted of a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) survey with 999 businesses.

The qualitative research encompassed 34 in-depth interviews with a range of organisations between February and March 2025.

1.2 Perceptions of product safety in industry

As in the 2022 research, organisations interviewed qualitatively said the UK had high standards of product safety. They felt that product safety was well-regulated and existing standards were trusted.

Businesses were asked what works well to ensure product safety in their industry. The most common response was the consistency or reliability of everyone in the supply chain (22%). This was significantly higher than in 2022 (16%). Regular checks and quality control processes was the next highest answer (11%), down from 17% in 2022. Other responses were largely consistent with the 2022, including sharing information between businesses and other organisations (8%).

Businesses were asked in the survey what their primary reason was for ensuring high levels of product safety standards, other than ensuring nobody was harmed. A range of motivations were selected, however the most common reason was to maintain a good business reputation (15%). Following this, 11% of businesses said they were motivated by ensuring the safety of the public (significantly higher than 5% in 2022).

[1] Strengthening national capacity for product safety: Strategy 2018-2020 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
[2] OPSS Product Regulation Strategy 2022-2025 - GOV.UK
[3] Product safety and industry: Wave 2 - GOV.UK
[4] Product safety and industry: Wave 1 - GOV.UK

Businesses were significantly more likely in 2024 than 2022 to say that making sure nobody is harmed was their only reason for ensuring product safety (14%, vs 10% in 2022). Businesses were also significantly more likely to say they had no responsibility to ensure product safety standards (18% in 2024, vs 5% in 2022).

1.3 Responsibility for product safety

As in 2022, two-thirds of businesses (66%) reported that manufacturers were primarily responsible for setting safety requirements for products. One quarter (28%) said retailers were responsible, similar to the proportion saying this in 2022 (27%). The proportion saying repairers and installers were responsible was also similar to the 2022 survey (14% in 2024, vs 13% in 2022).

Belief that responsibility for setting product safety requirements lies with the Government has declined. In 2024, around one-in-five businesses believed the Government was responsible for setting safety requirements for products in their industry (20%), down from around three-in-ten (29%) in 2022.

Businesses were asked who had the most responsibility for ensuring that product safety requirements are met. The majority of businesses felt that this was the responsibility of manufacturers (64%), similar to the proportion saying this in 2022 (62%).

In qualitative interviews many organisations reported that responsibility for product safety lay further up the chain or that the whole product supply chain bore responsibility for product safety.

1.4 Actions businesses take to ensure product safety

Businesses surveyed undertook several different actions to ensure high standards were met. In line with 2022 the most common action that businesses took was assisting with product recalls (73%). There was a reduction in the number of businesses that said they did the following:

- Assist in reporting unsafe, non-compliant or counterfeit goods (65% in 2024 vs 73% in 2022);
- Carry out internal audits or checks on the safety of products (30% vs 41%);
- Hold documentation relating to product safety standards (23% vs 32%); and
- Commission external companies to carry out checks (10% vs 18%).

As in previous years of the survey, the level of engagement among businesses with product registration was low (13% of all business encouraged registration). Businesses in the electronics sector were significantly more likely than average to encourage registration (25% vs 13%)

The most common reason for encouraging consumers to register their products was in order to activate a warranty (54%), however this had fallen since 2022 (73%). The second most common reason was for product safety reasons (27%) followed by upholding good customer service (18%).

Most organisations interviewed qualitatively had not been involved in a product recall and did not have a process in place if they needed one. Several assumed that it would be other organisations, specifically manufacturers, which would be in charge of organising the recall.

Among those that had conducted a recall these were generally one offs and while some had specific protocols in place, others had undertaken the process in an ad hoc manner. A lack of awareness was echoed in the quantitative survey, where two-thirds (65%) of businesses had not heard of the PAS 7100 Code of Practice[5] (Supporting Better Product Recalls), in line with 2022.

Awareness of PAS 7050 Code of Practice[6] (Bringing Safe goods to the market) was also low, with 74% of businesses reporting they had not heard of it. Furthermore, less than 1% of businesses surveyed had used it.

Product specific questions: Mitigating the risks of button batteries

Where relevant, businesses were also asked specific safety questions about button and coin batteries. Among businesses who handled products containing these batteries, awareness of related requirements[7] was low and had fallen since 2022 (10% compared to 22% in 2022).

Among all businesses who handled products containing button or coin batteries, one third (38%) took action to mitigate their risks, most often to display a warning on the product (15%), to display warnings elsewhere on the packaging (10%) or to ensure battery compartments are contained (9%).

1.5 Sources of support and information

Suppliers remain the most common source of information that businesses used to ensure compliance with product safety requirements (62%). This was followed by manufacturers (51%). Businesses used a range of sources, with 80% naming more than one.

As well as being the most common source of information, suppliers were also named the most useful (27%), consistent with 2022 (28%) and 2020 (24%). This was again followed by manufacturers (22%).

The vast majority (86%) of businesses somewhat or strongly agreed that they had the support and guidance they needed to ensure product safety, which was in line with the findings from 2022 and 2020.

In the qualitative interviews, many said that the guidance they had found was valuable and there was nothing missing. A small number said that they had expected specific information to be available to them that was not there.

Interactions with and perceptions of National Quality Infrastructure[8] delivery bodies whose customers are largely businesses, were mixed. The United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) and the British Standards Institution (BSI) were named specifically in interviews as sources of support or information.

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[5] PAS 7100:2022 Product Recall and Corrective Actions | BSI

[6] PAS 7050:2022 Bringing Safe Products to the Market | BSI

[7] Button battery requirements covered in the survey were: BS EN 62368-1 (Audio/visual, information and communication technology equipment, Part 1); PAS 7055:2021 (Button and coin batteries – Safety requirements – Specification); BS EN 60086-4:2015 (Primary batteries - Safety of lithium batteries); and BS EN 60086-5:2016)Primary batteries - Safety of batteries with aqueous electrolyte)

[8] The UK's National Quality Infrastructure - GOV.UK is delivered by NPL, OPSS, Local Authorities, UKAS and BSI.

1.6 Awareness and understanding of OPSS

Awareness of OPSS was low across all sectors, with over four fifths (83%) of businesses reporting that they had not heard of OPSS. The proportion who had heard of OPSS has decreased from 2022 (17% vs. 22% in 2022) but remained higher than awareness in 2020 (13%).

Businesses with more than 50 employees were significantly more likely to have heard of OPSS, compared to sole-traders and businesses with 1-9 employees (40% vs. 14% vs. 18% respectively).

Low awareness of OPSS was reflected in the qualitative interviews. Sole traders and micro businesses generally demonstrated lower awareness of OPSS. Small businesses[9] had slightly higher awareness but tended to lack an exact understanding of OPSS' role and how it maintains product safety standards in the UK. Trade Associations and the Local Authority Trading Standards that were interviewed demonstrated a more detailed understanding of OPSS.

Among businesses who had heard of OPSS the most common understanding of their role was ensuring products are safe for consumers (32%, a rise from 15% in 2022).

1.7 The role of Local Authorities

Local Authorities interviewed in the qualitative research strand said they had a number of responsibilities to ensure high standards of product safety in the UK. These fell under three broad categories:

- To provide advice to businesses to support compliance;
- To monitor product safety standards through proactive methods (for example through auditing businesses and testing products on the market); and
- To enforce product safety compliance where necessary through reactive methods (for example through mandating a product safety recall).

Around one in twelve businesses (8%) had interacted with Local Authorities regarding any product safety issues, significantly more than in 2022 when 4% had interacted with Local Authorities.

The most common reason for businesses interacting with Local Authorities was that their business had been audited / inspected by Trading Standards, a large increase since 2022 (55% vs. 24%).

Similarly to previous waves, very few businesses had a Primary Authority Partnership with a Local Authority (1%). Three quarters had not heard of Primary Authority Partnerships (73%) and 10% knew about them but did not have one.

1.8 Prevalence of AI

A new set of questions were asked in 2024 on prevalence of AI within industry. The majority (94%) of businesses had not used or were not using AI. One in twenty (5%) were currently using AI.

The most common uses of AI were marketing and sales analytics (62%). This was followed by customer service (17%) and product recommendations (14%).

[9] Defined as businesses with 10-49 employees. Full definitions of business size can be found in Table 2.1, Section 2.2.

Only 1% of businesses sold or distributed products with built in AI or machine learning.

In the qualitative interviews businesses who did not use AI were asked whether they were interested in using it in their business in the next 5 years. Many felt they had no requirement for AI, particularly smaller businesses. Some businesses were interested and saw potential to improve product safety through the use of AI. Ways of improving product safety included tracking products to reduce fraud.

Legal advisers[10] regarded AI as positive, seeing an opportunity to improve product safety, but that regulations needed to continue to be developed in line with developments in AI.

Organisations interviewed qualitatively in all industries felt that it was too early to really understand any impacts of AI on product safety. Organisations generally had a lack of understanding of scale, or any first-hand experience with AI and product safety.

1.9 Key challenges

As in 2022, most businesses (65%) in 2024 did not believe that they faced any challenges regarding product safety compliance. Where concerns were mentioned, the most common was reliance on others to meet standards (5%), though this had fallen since 2022 (8%).

The number concerned about the consistency and reliability of everyone in the supply chain had fallen from 12% in 2022 to 6% in 2024.

Manufacturers were significantly more likely to say their industry faced any challenges (54%, compared to 46% across all businesses), while retailers were the least likely to say their industry faced challenges (43%).

All of the Local Authorities and Trade Associations interviewed qualitatively had concerns about the impact online marketplaces might have on product safety. Some retailers and manufacturers also had concerns. These organisations felt it was easy for overseas businesses to sell products via online marketplaces without product safety checks being completed. Alternatively, some retailers and manufacturers were less concerned, but this was because they did not feel that their business or industry would be impacted by online marketplaces.

Just over a third of businesses (35%) agreed that effective regulation was in place to ensure products sold by third parties through online marketplaces to UK customers are safe. The proportion of businesses that agreed there was effective regulation had fallen since 2022 (46%). One in four (24%) disagreed there was effective regulation.

1.10 Future opportunities

Organisations interviewed in the qualitative research strand were asked to reflect on future opportunities which could improve the product safety system. A key theme that emerged from manufacturers, installers, and legal firms was the perceived differences between UK product safety and international regulation and requirements of product safety, particularly since the UK’s exit from the EU.

The growth of online markets and the ability to purchase directly from overseas was also a concern for Local Authorities and Trade Associations. Many felt that consumers were not aware of the extra risks of using online platforms to source goods directly from countries abroad. They explained that consumers may assume the same safety standards have been followed as a UK retailer.

[10] It should be noted that legal advisers do not belong to any specific sector for the purposes of this research.

2. Introduction

2.1 Background

One goal of the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) is to strengthen the evidence base for the development of product safety policy, delivery, and enforcement. As such, it launched its Strategic Research Programme in May 2018 and, in August of the same year, its strategy for strengthening product safety. Central to both of these initiatives is a suite of research projects to build on the OPSS' understanding of the actors within the system; their attitudes, current behaviours, and how Government may seek to impact those behaviours. Research to date had primarily focussed on the views and behaviours of consumers in relation to product safety; this project aims to complement this existing work by building a greater understanding of supply-side issues in the system.

Specifically, the objectives of the research were to investigate and track perceptions and attitudes towards product safety, and the product safety system; and to identify the extent to which these perceptions and attitudes vary across different system actors.

This report summarises the third wave of research fieldwork, carried out in 2024 and 2025; the first wave was carried out from 2019 to 2020 and the second in 2022. Comparisons to the previous waves are made throughout this report where relevant, and full findings from 2022 can be found in the published report[11], along with the first wave of research[12].

2.2 Methodology

Fieldwork was commissioned by the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) and conducted by IFF Research, an independent research company. This was a mixed-method research project comprising a qualitative and a quantitative research strand. The quantitative research strand consisted of a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) survey with 999 businesses, covering a broad range of sectors (see Figure 2.1). Survey fieldwork ran between October and December 2024. The qualitative research encompassed 34 depth interviews with a range of organisations (detailed in table 2.2 and in the technical report[13]) between February and March 2025.

Profile of businesses in quantitative survey

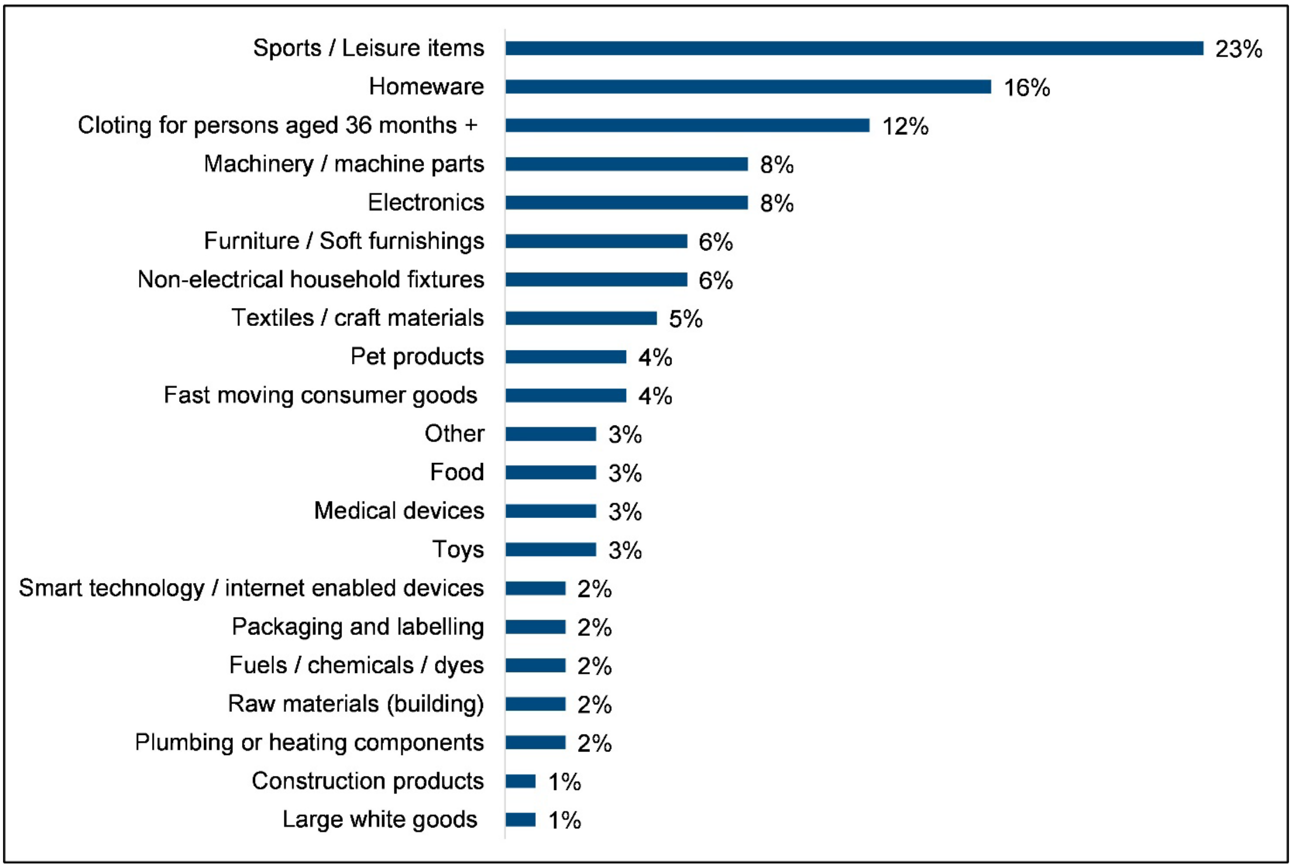
Table 2.1 and figure 2.1 show a profile of the 999 businesses who took part in the 19-minute[14] CATI survey. It should be noted that businesses were sampled based on their SIC Code but were asked to identify, during the survey, what their primary function was. Table 1 shows business's responses to this question.

[11] Product safety and industry: Wave 2 - GOV.UK
[12] Product safety and industry: Wave 1 - GOV.UK
[13] 13260 - W3 Technical Report V4 - final.docx
[14] Interview times were predicted to be 25 minutes but averaged 19 minutes.

Table 2.1 Number of businesses surveyed by size and business function[15]

Primary business function	Sole (0)	Micro (1-9)	Small (10-49)	Medium (50-249)	Large (250+)	Total
Retailer	57	209	40	5	5	316
Manufacturer	29	153	141	81	14	418
Installer	8	25	16	3	0	52
Fulfilment service provider	14	66	40	6	4	130
Repairer	13	25	5	4	0	47
Importer	3	15	10	1	1	30
Unknown[16]	1	3	2	0	0	6
Total	125	496	254	100	24	999

Figure 2.1 Sectors of businesses surveyed[17]



A4. What type of product does your company [sell/manufacture/install/distribute/repair]? Base: All businesses (999).

[15] Business size was determined by the number of employees
[16] Some businesses chose not to provide their primary business function during the survey
[17] Total responses sums >100% as businesses were able to select multiple sectors in their response.

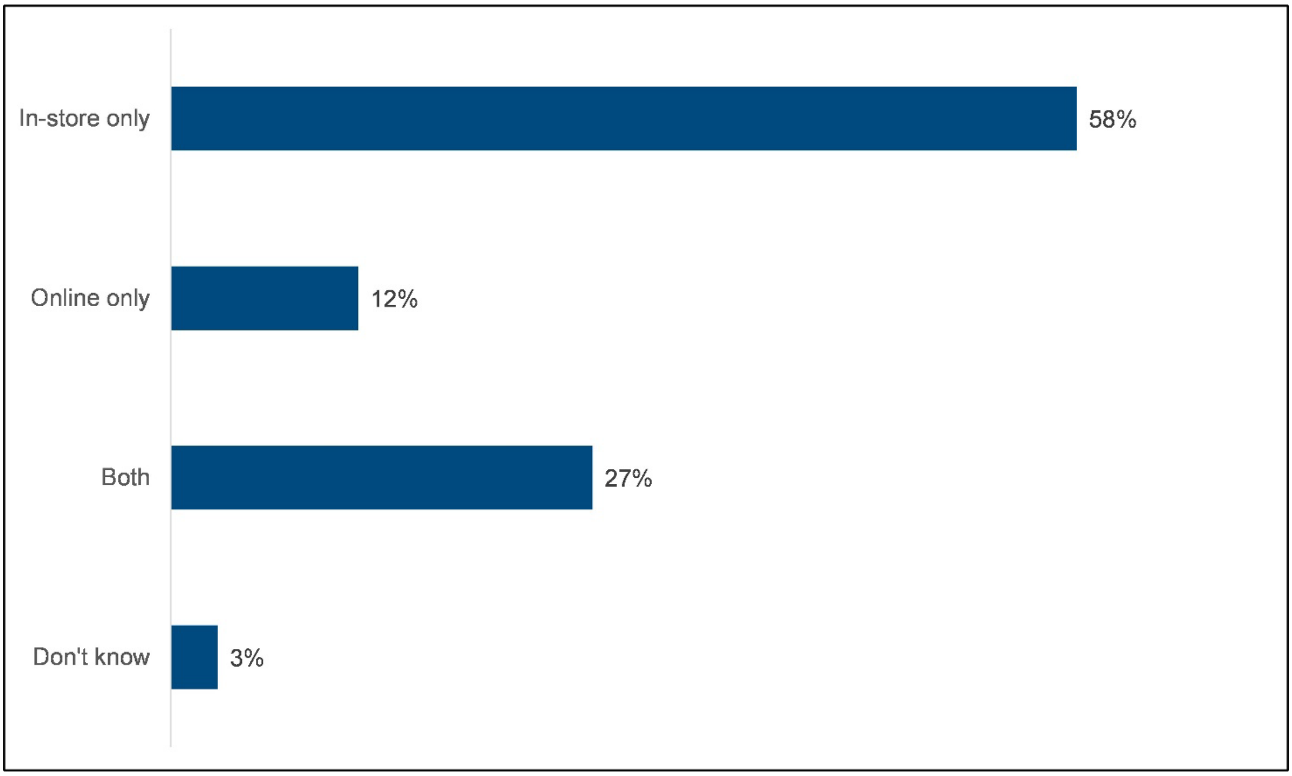
Businesses surveyed covered a large range of products that they sold, manufactured, installed, distributed, and repaired, including[18]:

- Sports / Leisure items (23%)
- Homeware (16%)
- Clothing for persons aged 36 months and older (12%)
- Machinery / machine parts (8%)
- Electronics (8%)
- Furniture / soft furnishings (6%)
- Non-electrical household fixtures (6%)
- Textiles / craft materials (5%)
- Pet products (4%)
- Fast moving consumer goods (4%)
- Food (3%)
- Medical devices (3%)
- Toys (3%)
- Smart technology / internet enabled devices (2%)
- Packaging and labelling (2%)
- Fuels / chemicals / dyes (2%)
- Raw materials (building) (2%)
- Plumbing or heating components (2%)
- Construction products (1%)
- Large white goods (1%)
- Other products (3%)

As demonstrated in Figure 2.2 businesses most commonly sold their products in store only (58%). Only 12% of businesses sold their products solely online. Around a quarter (27%) of retailers sold products both online and in-store. Among those who sold online, 91% sold through their own website or app and 10% sold through third-party social media marketplaces (such as Facebook Marketplace).

[18] As in Figure 2.1, businesses were allowed to select multiple types of products that their company sells/manufactures/installs/repairs/distributes.

Figure 2.2 Methods used by retailers to sell their products



A5. Do you sell your products in-store or online? Base: All retailers (411)

Profile of organisations in qualitative depth interviews

A total of 34 interviews were conducted as part of the qualitative research. Tables 2.2 to 2.4 break down the profile of organisations that took part in the qualitative research. Table 2.2 shows the number of achieved interviews, by business function, against the initial target. In table 2.3 we show the breakdown by sector of relevant businesses (i.e. those that sold or distributed products as part of their business function). In table 2.4 we break down these relevant businesses by size.

Table 2.2 Completed qualitative interviews by business function

Business function	Target	Achieved
Total	**35**	**34**
Retail and distribution	8	8
Manufacturers	8	8
Repair and Installation	4	4
Legal advisers[19]	3	3
Insurers	2	2
Response management	2	2

[19] It should be noted that legal advisers do not belong to any specific sector for the purposes of this research.

Business function	Target	Achieved
Trade Associations	2	1
Local Authority Trading Standards	6	6
Total	**35**	**34**

Table 2.3 Number of completed depth interviews by main sector,

Primary business function	Electr-onics / 'Smart' tech-nology	Toys	Cos-metics	Furniture / soft furnish-ings	Cloth-ing	Other	Total
Retail and distribution	1	1	0	2	1	3	8
Manu-facturer	1	0	0	1	0	6	8
Repair and Installation	1	0	0	0	0	3	4
Other[20]	0	0	0	0	0	14	14
Total	3	1	0	3	1	26	34

Table 2.4 Number of completed depth interviews by size, where relevant[21]

Primary business function	Sole trader (0)	Micro (1-9)	Small (10-49)	Medium (10-249)	Large (250+)	Total
Retail and distribution	3	3	2	0	0	8
Manufacturer	1	3	4	0	0	8
Repair and Installation	0	4	0	0	0	4
Total	4	10	6	0	0	20

[20] Insurers, Local Authorities, legal advisers, response management, and Trade Associations are listed as 'other' as they did not participate in the survey.
[21] Table only includes a breakdown of the 20 businesses that sold or distributed products. Insurers, Local Authorities, legal advisers, response management, and Trade Associations are not included as this table shows only interview participants who also completed the survey.

2.3 Reporting conventions

Throughout the report, references to 'organisations interviewed' refers to the qualitative research strand, and reference to 'businesses surveyed' refers to the quantitative research strand. Where percentages are given, these exclusively refer to quantitative survey findings.

Throughout the report, references to businesses' size are based on number of employees. Due to the limited number of businesses interviewed with more the 250 employees, medium and large businesses are often grouped together, and referred to as 'large and medium sized' businesses. 'Large' businesses refer to those with 250 employees or more, 'medium' refers to 50-249 employees, 'small' refers to 10-49 employees and 'micro' refers to 1-9 employees. 'Sole trader' refers to a self-employed business owner with no employees.

When percentages are provided in the text for sub-groups, the proportion of this sub-group that gave an answer is statistically significantly different to the average of those not in this sub-group, at the 95% confidence level. The phrasing "most likely," "more likely than average" or "particularly likely" etc. is used as a shorthand for this. These subgroup percentages are not usually shown within the chart they refer to, instead the overall figures are shown, and subgroups are compared to this overall figure.

Differences between findings in 2024 and 2022 are reported on throughout. Where there are statistically significant differences this will be stated, using phrases such as "more likely than in 2022" or 'less likely than in 2022'. Where there is not a significant difference the phrasing 'in line with 2022' or 'similar to 2022' is used. Occasionally comparisons from the 2020 are made, the same conventions apply to significant and non-significant changes.

Unless explicitly noted, all findings are based on weighted data; weighting was based on self-reported functions of the businesses in the sample. Unweighted bases (the number of responses from which the findings are derived) are displayed on tables and charts as appropriate to give an indication of the robustness of results.

Please note that results may not sum to 100% due to rounding and/or due to businesses being able to select more than one answer to a question.

Throughout this report, quotes attributed to 'Local Authorities' are drawn from employees of Local Authority Trading Standards teams. Additionally, where references to and quotes are attributed to 'legal advisers', it should be noted that they do not belong to a specific sector but are a professional who provides expert advice on legal matters to individuals, businesses and organisations.

Throughout this report there are references to both product safety standards and product safety requirements / regulations, the definitions[22] of which are set out below:

- Product safety standards are documents, established by consensus and approved by a recognised body, that provides, for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines or characteristics for activities or their results, aimed at the achievement of the optimum degree of order in a given context[23].
- Product safety regulations are documents providing binding legislative rules, which are adopted by an authority[24].

[22] ISO/IEC Guide 2:2004(en), Standardization and related activities — General vocabulary
[23] SOURCE: ISO/IEC Guide 2:2004, 3.2
[24] SOURCE: ISO/IEC Guide 2:2004, 3.6

3. Perceptions of product safety in industry

This chapter examines how businesses perceive product safety standards in the UK, drawing on both survey data and qualitative interviews. In section 3.1, we show that most businesses viewed the UK's product safety regime as robust and well-regulated. In section 3.2 we show that motivations for maintaining product safety vary, with reputation, accountability, and legal compliance being key drivers

3.1 Views on product safety standards in the UK

Organisations interviewed qualitatively tended to believe that UK has high standards of product safety. This finding is consistent with responses from the 2022 research. Businesses felt that product safety was well-regulated and that existing expectations, such as the UKCA and CE mark, were trusted.

"On the whole the UK has a pretty strict and effective regime in relation to product safety" – ***Legal adviser***

Businesses working with electrical products tended to be confident that there were high levels of product safety standards within the UK. In particular those in the electronics sector explained that, because of potential danger of products within their sector, it was essential that products were well regulated. These businesses were more likely than those in other sectors to specify certain regulations and requirements, which is reflective of findings so far in small business research[25], which is linked to this research and its previous waves.

"Given the industry is electronics you wouldn't necessarily find one [unsafe product on the market]. … Because of the regulations that are put in place and everything else you can't really get a product on the market without going through the right standard testing." – **Manufacturer, Micro**

"There's probably a slightly higher bar in terms of bringing an electrical appliance to market than a toy … We have a rich heritage in our sector in working on safety." – **Trade Association**

When asked how their industry managed product safety, specifics varied, but many mentioned United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) and the British Standards Institution (BSI), as well as sector specific regulators or standards agencies such as the LIA (Lighting Industry Association).

Many businesses, especially retailers and those selling electronic goods or furniture, said that it was standard practice to checked testing certificates for new products. Again, this finding is reflective of findings so far in the small business research, which is under way. Businesses also mentioned independent testing and product recall plans as ways of maintaining product safety.

[25] Attitudes to Product Safety Among Small Businesses Final.docx

Product safety standards were less top of mind for some smaller manufacturers and retailers. Several of those interviewed felt they worked with low-risk products, including books, clothing, and art and crafts.

"Our products [craft kits] are pretty low risk … I'm not saying we're not concerned … but a certain amount of common sense." – ***Manufacturer, Small***

Some retailers said that they were unsure how safety was managed, explaining that they ordered from companies that had good reputations and made the assumption that these companies were maintaining standards.

"To be honest, I don't know, I don't really know anything. All I know is that I order off of companies that sell all the goods, and they must be licenced to sell them. So, all the rules should be followed by them" – **Retailer, Small**

As in the 2022 research, a number of organisations expressed concern about product safety standards in other countries and for products purchased on online marketplaces. One electrical installer had rejected lighting purchased on an online marketplace because it had substandard wiring, while others expressed concern about product safety standards in other countries.

"If you bought a very cheap fixing …, from [online marketplace] or from[abroad], you wouldn't know what tests they'd undergone … whereas if they were from a more reputable picture framing supplier in this country, you would know that they were of a certain standard." – **Retail & Distribution, Micro**

One legal adviser[26] stressed the need for greater consistency between the UK and EU, as having differences creates extra cost. They felt the UK was being left behind following exit from the EU on the 31st of January 2020 and that product safety standards were progressing faster in the EU.

In the survey, businesses were asked what works well to ensure product safety in their industry. The top response was the consistency or reliability of everyone in the supply chain (22%), which was more likely to be mentioned this time than in the 2022 survey (16%) as shown in Figure 3.1. Regular checks and quality control processes was the next highest answer (11%), down significantly from 17% in 2022. Followed by a good framework of product safety legislation in the UK (9%), down significantly from 12% in 2022. Other responses were largely consistent with the previous survey, including sharing information between businesses and other organisations (8%) and good training / support for employees (4%).

Around one-in-twenty businesses (6%) mentioned feedback from or communication with customers, down significantly from 10% in 2022. Around a quarter of businesses (26%) said they did not know what works well to ensure product safety within their industry, similar to the proportion saying this in 2022.

[26] It should be noted that legal advisers do not belong to any specific sector for the purposes of this research.

Figure 3.1 What works well to ensure product safety

F2. And what do you think works well to ensure product safety within your industry? Base: All businesses: 2024 (999); 2022 (1000). Responses below 4% in 2024 not shown. *Indicates significant difference between 2024 and 2022. The sum of the responses adds to more than 100% because respondents were able to give multiple responses.

There was some variation between business function in terms of what worked well to ensure product safety within their industry. Responses often reflected the different positions within the supply chain.

Manufacturers and installers were more likely to mention regular checks and quality control processes (both 23%, compared to 11% average), while retailers were more likely to say that the consistency or reliability of everyone in the supply chain works well (26%, compared to 22% average).

Repairers were the most likely to mention producing high quality goods and products (21%). Importers were more likely to cite a good framework of product safety legislation in the UK (37%), though this finding should be treated with caution due to the small base size (30). Fulfilment service providers were the most likely to say nothing works well (12%).

Large and medium sized businesses were more likely to mention several things that work well to ensure product safety, including:

- Sharing of information between businesses and other organisations around product safety (23%, compared to 8% average);
- Regular checks and quality control processes (20%, compared to 11% average);
- Advice and support from trade bodies (7%, compared to 3% average).

Sole traders were more likely than other business sizes to say they don't know what works well within the industry (29%, compared to 26% average).

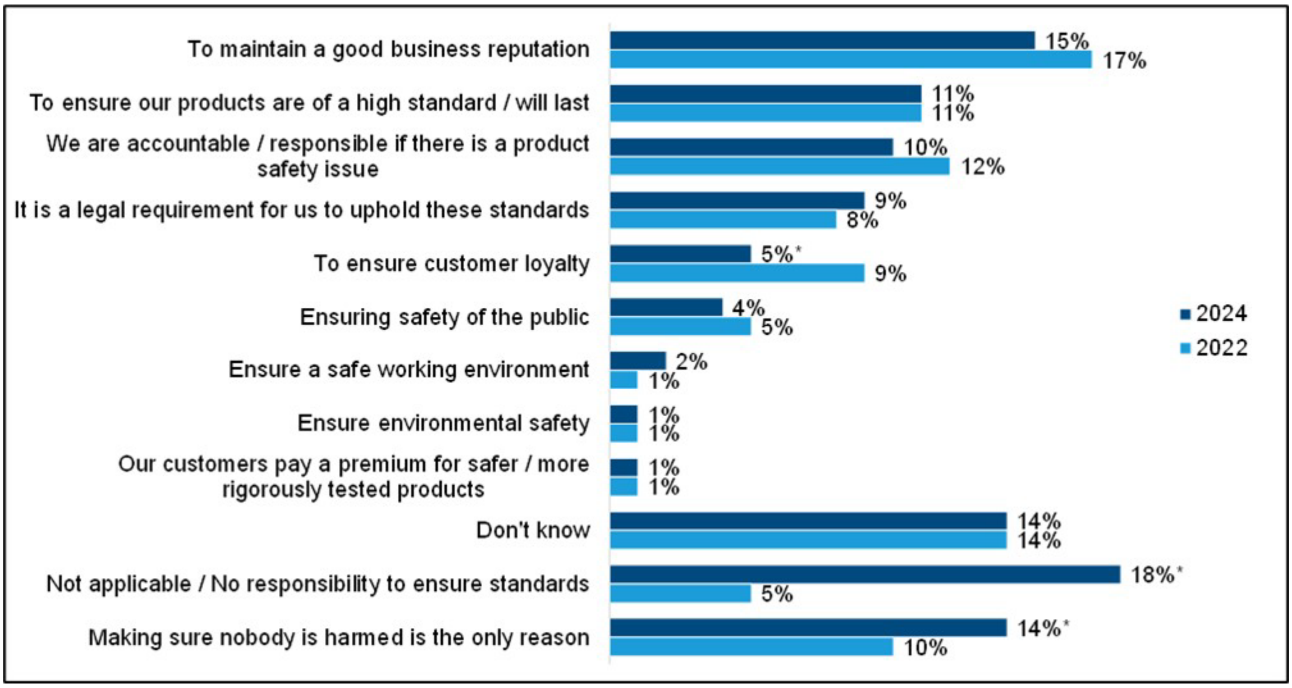
In summary, businesses generally believed that UK maintains high standards of product safety and expressed confidence in the regulatory regime and trusted marks such as UKCA and CE. This perception was particularly strong among those working with electrical products, who cited the necessity of strict regulation due to higher risks, while businesses in lower-risk sectors were less engaged with specific safety requirements and often relied on supplier reputation. Survey findings showed that consistency within the supply chain and regular checks were seen as key factors in ensuring product safety. Overall, the findings highlight a generally robust approach to product safety in the UK but also point to gaps in awareness and challenges related to international standards and online sales.

3.2 Motivations for ensuring product safety standards

As in previous surveys, businesses surveyed were asked the primary reason their business ensures high levels of product safety standards, other than to make sure that no one is harmed. As shown in Figure 3.2, the top motivation was to maintain a good business reputation (15%, in line with the 2022 finding of 17%), followed by ensuring that products were of high standard and will last (11%) . One in ten businesses mentioned that they were accountable for any product safety issues (10%), and a similar proportion said it was a legal requirement to uphold these standards (9%). Around one-in-seven (14%) responded that the only motivation for ensuring product safety is ensuring that nobody is harmed.

Businesses in the 2024 survey were significantly more likely to say that making sure nobody is harmed is the only reason (14%, vs 10% in 2022). They were also significantly more likely to respond that this question was not applicable or that they have no responsibility to ensure product safety standards (18% in 2024, vs 5% in 2022).

Figure 3.2. Motivations for ensuring product safety, other than ensuring nobody is harmed



E2. Other than to make sure nobody is harmed, what is the primary reason your business ensures high levels of product safety standards? Base: All businesses: 2024 (999); 2022 (1000). Responses below 2% in 2024 not shown. *Indicates significant difference between 2024 and 2022.

Manufacturers were more likely than average to mention maintaining a good business reputation (24%, compared to 15% overall) and ensuring products were of high standard and will last (21% compared to 11% overall). Retailers were more likely to say they would be accountable if there was a product safety issue (13%, compared to 10% overall), and installers were more likely to mention ensuring a safe working environment (11%, compared to 2% overall).

Installers were least likely to say that the only reason for ensuring high levels of product safety standards was to ensure that nobody was harmed (2%, compared to 14% overall), while fulfilment service providers were the most likely to respond that this was not applicable or that they have no responsibility to ensure product safety standards (26%, compared to 18% overall).

Larger and medium sized businesses were more likely than average to respond that it was a legal requirement to uphold these standards (26%, compared to 9% overall).

Organisations interviewed qualitatively echoed these motivations when asked about their reasons for ensuring high levels of product safety standards. For example, a manufacturer of fire safety devices said there would be an impact on sales if they tried to sell products without the necessary safety certificates, but also a bigger issue in terms of public safety from faulty smoke detectors.

Organisations which handled products designed for children emphasised the particular importance of product safety, with some reporting that consumers are more concerned about safety when buying for their children. A furniture retailer explained that their reputation was at stake if products they sell do not adhere to British Standards Institution (BSI) standards and felt that product safety compliance was based on a fear of losing their reputation, although they relied on suppliers to conduct this testing.

Some organisations also explained that it was a legal requirement for businesses to comply with product safety standards and to conduct risk assessments.

> *"It is a requirement of all manufacturers in our sector to have risk assessments as part of their processes."* – **Trade Association**

Additionally, some organisations suggested that product safety standards are not a big consideration for them and that their only responsibility was buying from reputable companies.

3.3 Chapter 3 conclusion

Overall, these findings show that while reputation, accountability, and legal compliance are important motivators, there were notable differences in priorities depending on business function and size. Some businesses see product safety as primarily the responsibility of their suppliers. The topic of where responsibility for product safety lies is explored in the next chapter.

Additionally, while it is positive to note that some businesses in high-risk sectors have a good knowledge of product safety, these findings show that those in lower risk sectors tend to have weaker knowledge. These insights may inform future engagement strategies across sectors, where appropriate.

Summary of findings related to perceptions of product safety

- Large businesses demonstrated a stronger awareness of product safety practices and regulations as well as more robust and strict safety practices.
- Many small or non-electronics sector businesses are less engaged with product safety standards.
- Consistency / reliability of everyone in the supply chain was the top factor cited for ensuring product safety by businesses.
- Business reputation, ensuring the safety of the public and legal accountability were key motivations for ensuring product safety, other than ensuring nobody is harmed. Promotional guidance and campaigns emphasising the reputational damage or legal consequences of unsafe or non-compliant products could further motivate businesses to ensure compliance.

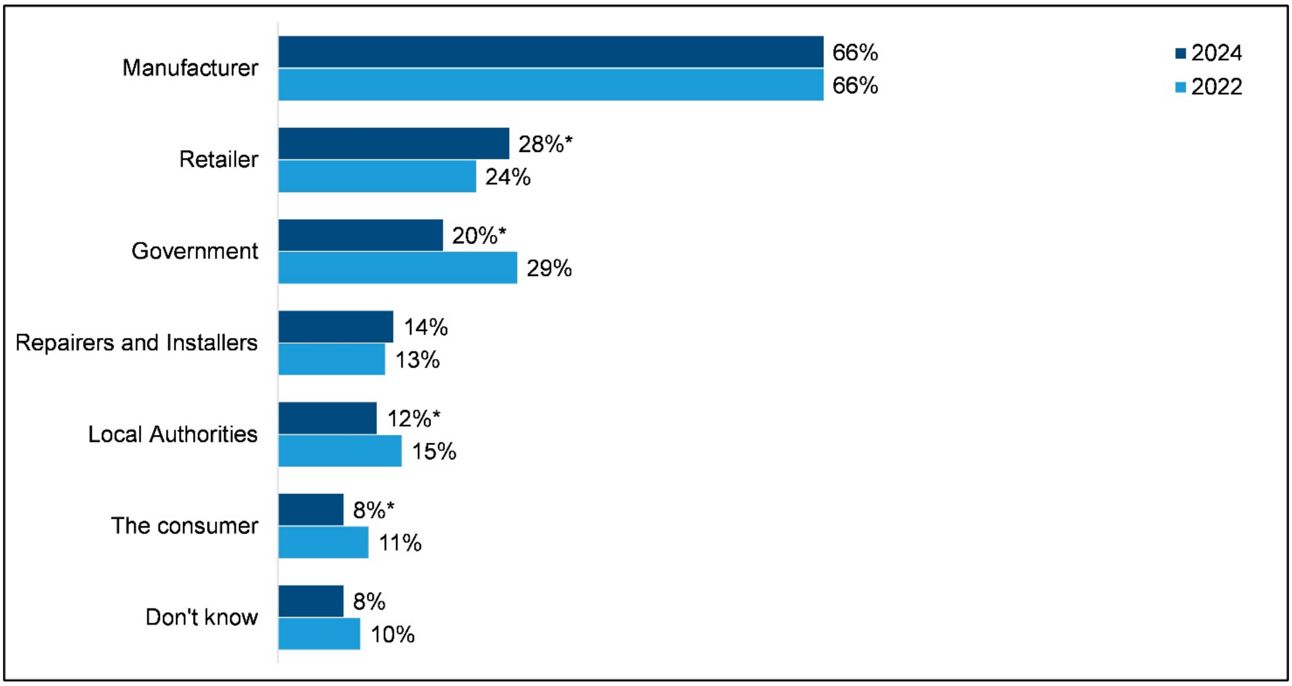
4. Responsibility for product safety

In this chapter, we explore perceptions of responsibility for product safety within the UK. In sections 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3, we show that manufacturers, followed by retailers, are perceived as having the most responsibility for setting and meeting product safety requirements, and resolving issues when they occur. In section 4.3, we also show qualitative insights that suggest businesses often view product safety as a shared responsibility across the supply chain, with some relying heavily on manufacturers and suppliers for compliance, whilst others felt that responsibility was distributed among all actors involved.

4.1 Responsibility for setting product safety requirements

Businesses were asked who had the most responsibility for setting product safety requirements – their responses are shown in Figure 4.1. In line with findings from 2022, two-thirds of businesses (66%) reported that manufacturers were responsible for setting product safety requirements. Following this, more than a quarter (28%) said responsibility fell with retailers, significantly more than in 2022 (24%). The proportion that felt responsibility lay with the Government fell significantly from 29% in 2022 to 20% in 2024. Similarly, there was a significant decline in the portion of businesses that believe responsibility fell on Local Authorities (12% compared to 15% in 2022) and the consumer (8% compared to 11% in 2022).

Figure 4.1 Responsibility for setting product safety requirements



E1_1. In your industry, who is most responsible for: Setting product safety? Base: All businesses: 2024 (999); 2022 (1,000). *Indicates significant difference between 2024 and 2022. The sum of the responses adds to more than 100% because respondents were able to give multiple responses.

The top response among businesses of all functions was that responsibility for setting product safety requirements lay with manufacturers. Installers were most likely to say manufacturers were responsible for setting safety requirements (98% compared 66% overall).

Retailers were most likely to say that responsibility for setting safety requirements fell within their own function (32%, compared to 28% overall) – which was also the case in 2022 (31% compared to 24% overall). Repairers and installers were also most likely to say responsibility lies with their own business function (39% of installers and 32% of repairers gave this response, compared to 14% overall). Fulfilment service providers and importers (base 30) were more likely to place responsibility with the Government (both 38%, compared to 20% overall).

There were also differences by size, with large and medium sized businesses more likely to place responsibility with the Government (59% of businesses with more than 50 employees said this, compared to 16% of sole traders), and with Local Authorities (38%, compared to 12% of sole traders). Sole traders were more likely to place responsibility with retailers (31%, compared to 20% of those with more than 50 employees).

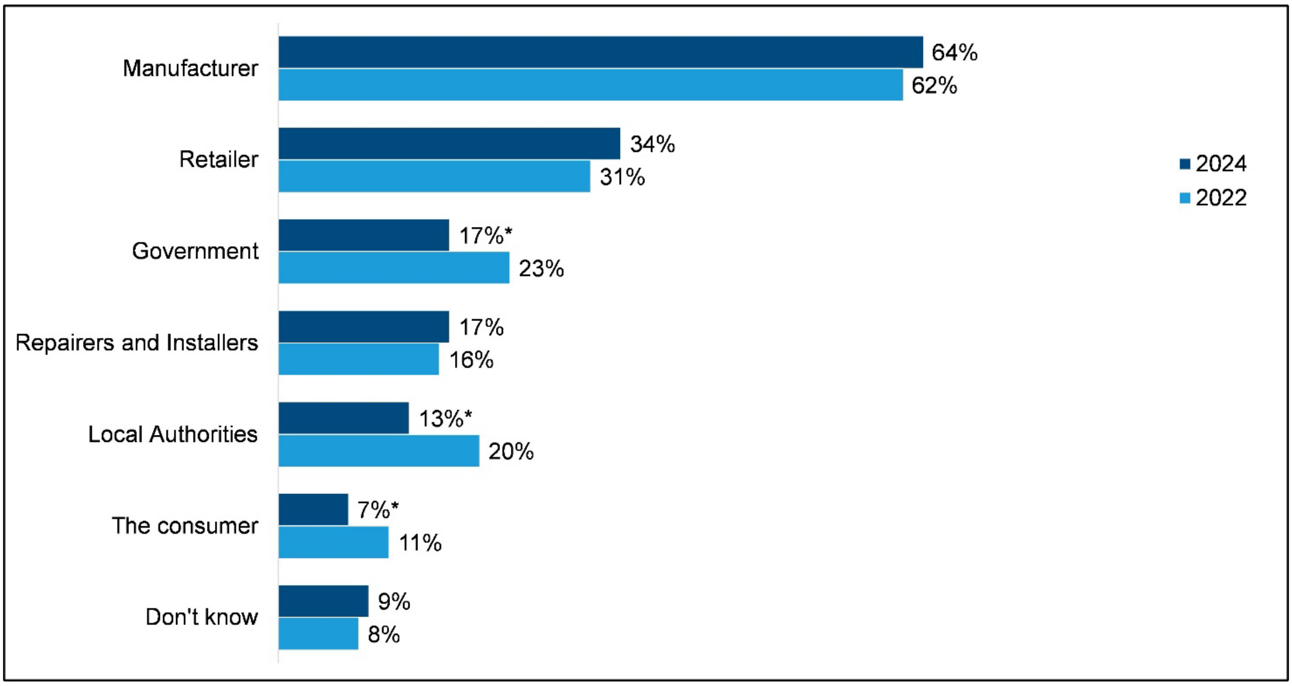
Those who were aware of OPSS were more likely to say responsibility lies with the Government (34%, compared to 18% of those who were not aware). They were also more likely to place responsibility for setting product safety standards with manufacturers (74%, compared to 64% unaware), and less likely to say it lies with retailers (21%, compared to 29% unaware).

4.2 Responsibility for ensuring product safety requirements are met

Businesses were next asked who they felt had responsibility for ensuring that product safety requirements were met. Results are shown in Figure 4.2. Once again, most businesses felt that this was the responsibility of manufacturers (64%), similar to the proportion saying this in 2022 (62%). Around a third of businesses (34%) felt that responsibility was with retailers, again similar to the 2022 survey (31%).

There was a decrease in the number of businesses that felt that Government was responsible for ensuring requirements are met (17% compared to 23% in 2024). Similarly, businesses were significantly less likely to place responsibility with Local Authorities in 2024 (13%), compared to 2022 (20%). The proportion who felt that responsibility for meeting product safety requirements lay with the consumer had also fallen significantly, from 11% in 2022 to 7% in 2024.

Figure 4.2. Responsibility for ensuring product safety requirements are met



E1_2. In your industry, who is most responsible for: Ensuring these safety requirements are met? Base: All businesses: 2024 (999); 2022 (1,000). *Indicates significant difference between 2024 and 2022. The sum of the responses adds to more than 100% because respondents were able to give multiple responses.

There were some significant differences by business function. Retailers were the most likely to state that responsibility for upholding product safety requirements lay with retailers (43%, compared to 34% overall). Repairers and installers were also more likely to cite their own business function (58% of repairers and 51% of installers said they had responsibility for ensuring safety requirements are met, compared to 17% overall).

As with setting product safety requirements, importers (base 30) and fulfilment service providers were also more likely to say that responsibility for ensuring requirements were met lay with the Government (34% and 24% respectively, compared to 17% overall).

There were different perspectives by size of business. Large and medium sized businesses were more likely than sole traders to place responsibility for meeting product safety requirements with manufacturers (77%, vs 60%), the Government (37%, vs 15%), Local Authorities (20%, vs 12%) and the consumer (13% vs 6%). On the other hand, sole traders were more likely to say that responsibility lay with retailers (38%, compared to 20% of businesses with more than 50 employees).

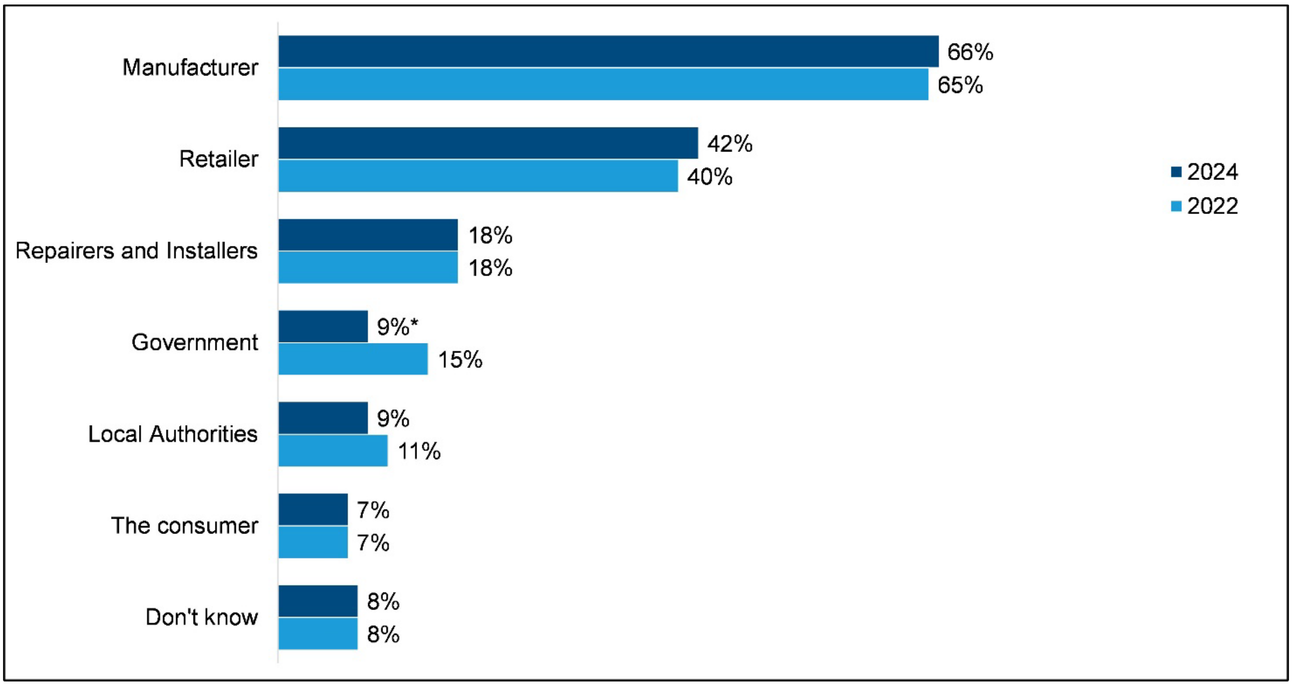
4.3 Responsibility for resolving product safety issues when they arise

Finally, businesses were asked who they felt had the most responsibility for resolving product safety issues when they arose. Once again, as shown in figure 4.3, most businesses felt manufacturers had responsibility for this area (66%) followed by retailers (42%). Both these results are in line with findings from 2022. Just under one-in-five (18%) said that repairers and installers should be responsible for resolving product safety issues, the same proportion as the 2022 findings.

Businesses responding to the survey in 2024 were significantly less likely to consider the Government responsible for resolving product safety issues (9% compared to 15% in

2022). 7% of businesses felt that responsibility lies with the consumer, the same proportion as said this in the 2022 survey (7%).

Figure 4.3: Responsibility for resolving product safety issues when they arise



E1_3. In your industry, who is most responsible for: Resolving product safety issues when they arise? Base: All businesses: 2024 (999); 2022 (1,000). *Indicates significant difference between 2024 and 2022. The sum of the responses adds to more than 100% because respondents were able to give multiple responses.

As with the previous two questions about responsibility on setting product safety requirements and ensuring they are upheld, businesses from each function placed greater responsibility on themselves compared to other businesses:

- 78% of manufacturers felt manufacturers had responsibility (vs. 66% of all businesses);
- 53% of retailers felt retailers had responsibility (vs. 42% of all businesses);
- 63% of installers felt installers/repairers had responsibility (vs. 18% of all businesses); and
- 52% of repairers felt installers/repairers had responsibility (vs. 18% of all businesses).

Importers were again more likely to say that responsibility lay with the manufacturer (88% vs 66% overall). Installers and importers were also the most likely to place responsibility with the consumer (31% and 23% respectively, compared to 7% of all businesses). However, it is worth remembering that these results should be treated with caution because of the low base size of importers (30).

Businesses involved in electronics were also more likely than all businesses to place responsibility with the manufacturer (80%, compared to 66% overall), as were those selling button batteries (88%).

There were also differences by size of business. Those with more than 50 employees were more likely than sole traders to place responsibility for resolving product safety issues with:

- Manufacturers (89%, vs 62% of sole traders);
- The Government (21%, compared to 9% of sole traders);
- The consumer (17%, compared to 7% of sole traders).

However, sole traders (46%) were more likely than large and medium sized businesses (29%) to place responsibility with retailers.

In qualitative interviews, different business functions had differing views on who was responsible for product safety. However, businesses commonly suggested that ultimately, responsibility for product safety lay further up product chain, with manufacturers or even component manufacturers.

"If an energy driver [component part] isn't safe that's where the problem starts." – **Manufacturer, Micro**

None of the installers interviewed felt they had primary responsibility, instead reporting their role was limited to installation rather than product compliance itself. They assumed that products from major manufacturers were properly certified and safe, and it would be unrealistic and not cost-efficient for them to conduct independent electrical checks on every item.

"We're going to assume that the products we've bought … are certificated and correct." – **Installer, Micro**

Similarly, the distributor interviewed also felt that ultimate responsibility lay elsewhere, possibly with the potential buyer. They had limited knowledge of product safety and subcontracted safety checks.

"If people ask me questions [about product safety] I honestly answer them to the best of my ability. If they don't ask me questions, I don't volunteer anything." – **Distributor, Sole Trader**

However, some organisations interviewed, particularly retailers and manufacturers, felt that the whole product chain bore responsibility for product safety.

"I think everybody has some level of responsibility. I mean, I have responsibility to my customers to ensure that I am sourcing my products properly and from suitable sources. I could in theory go online and buy materials without really knowing their history or the background … but I know that the vinyl I supply is safe." – **Retailer, Sole trader**

"Literally from the customer when they're deciding what metal to use, to the supplier at the mill for whenever they're manufacturing it, to then us ourselves to ensure that we're controlling traceability the entire way through our processes as well as the traceability of controlling the quality of the product." – **Retailer, Small**

One Trade Association mentioned that while ensuring the safety of products within the UK fell on OPSS and Local Authorities, when it came to online marketplaces, the consumers needed to be aware of different safety requirements abroad. When purchasing from abroad, consumers needed to be aware that products may not be subject to the same safety standards as a UK retailer. However, they also felt that the platform should bear responsibility, as it was unrealistic to expect all consumers to conduct sufficient safety checks.

> *"I suppose it's a bit naïve and reliance on 'there must be someone doing it', but actually when you look into it, [consumers are importing] directly from [abroad]. So, it's up to them to check it's safe. And a lot of them aren't".* – **Trade Association**

4.4 Chapter 4 conclusion

This chapter has shown that the majority of businesses view manufacturers as holding the greatest responsibility for setting, upholding, and resolving product safety requirements. Retailers were also seen as playing a significant role, both these findings are consistent with 2022. There has been a decline, since 2022 in the proportion of businesses attributing responsibility to the Government, Local Authorities, and consumers, reflecting a shift towards greater industry ownership of product safety. Qualitative interviews highlighted that while many businesses rely on suppliers or manufacturers higher up the supply chain for product safety, there is some recognition that effective product safety management requires collaboration and accountability at every stage.

In line with findings from chapter 3, findings from this chapter show that businesses attach a high importance to manufacturers when regarding product safety responsibility. This may inform future OPSS industry research.

Summary of responsibility for product safety

- As seen in previous waves, businesses felt that manufacturers are primarily responsible for ensuring product safety, whilst other actors also acknowledged their own role (retailers, installers and distributors) but still felt this was primarily the manufacturers responsibility.
- Larger businesses placed more responsibility for ensuring product safety on the Government and key regulators, whilst smaller businesses tended to place responsibility on those further back in the supply chain e.g. manufacturers or those facing consumers, such as retailers / distributors
- Perceptions of the level of responsibility in ensuring product safety for Government, Local Authorities and OPSS have significantly declined overall since 2022.

5. Actions taken to ensure product safety

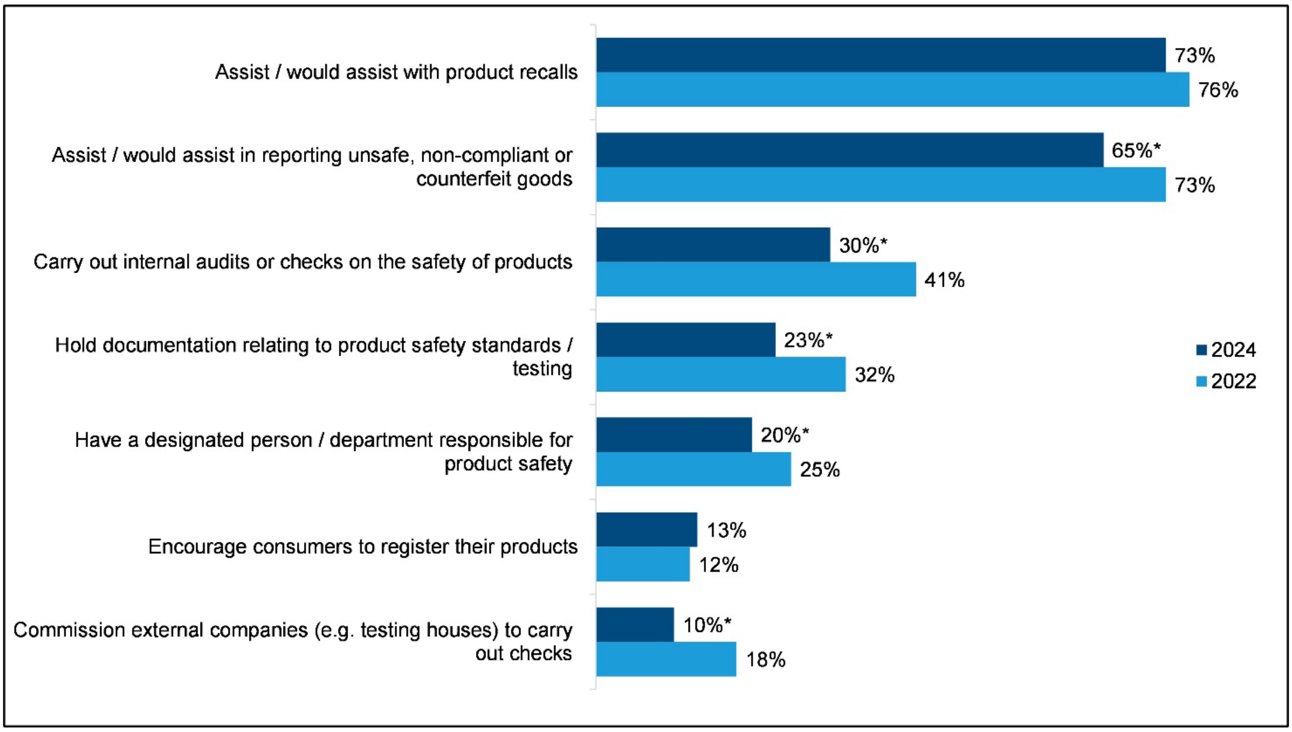
In this chapter, we examine the actions businesses take to uphold product safety standards, including their use of risk assessment (5.1), attitudes to product registration (5.2), and approaches to product recalls (5.3). In section 5.3 and 5.4, we show that awareness and use of key codes of practice such as PAS 7100 and PAS 7050 is low, in line with 2022. Section 5.5 shows that awareness of standards regarding button batteries has fallen since 2022 and more than half of businesses that used products containing button batteries took no action to mitigate their risk.

5.1 Actions taken to ensure product safety

Businesses undertook several different actions to ensure product safety standards were upheld. As shown in Figure 5.1, the most common action that businesses took was assisting with product recalls (73%), in line with findings from 2022. There was a significant reduction between the 2024 and 2022 surveys in the number of businesses that said they would do the following:

- Assist/would assist in reporting unsafe, non-compliant or counterfeit goods (65% in 2024 vs 73% in 2022);
- Carry out internal audits or checks on the safety of products (30% vs 41%);
- Hold documentation relating to product safety standards (23% vs 32%);
- Commission external companies to carry out checks (10% vs 18%).

Figure 5.1 Actions taken to ensure product safety standards



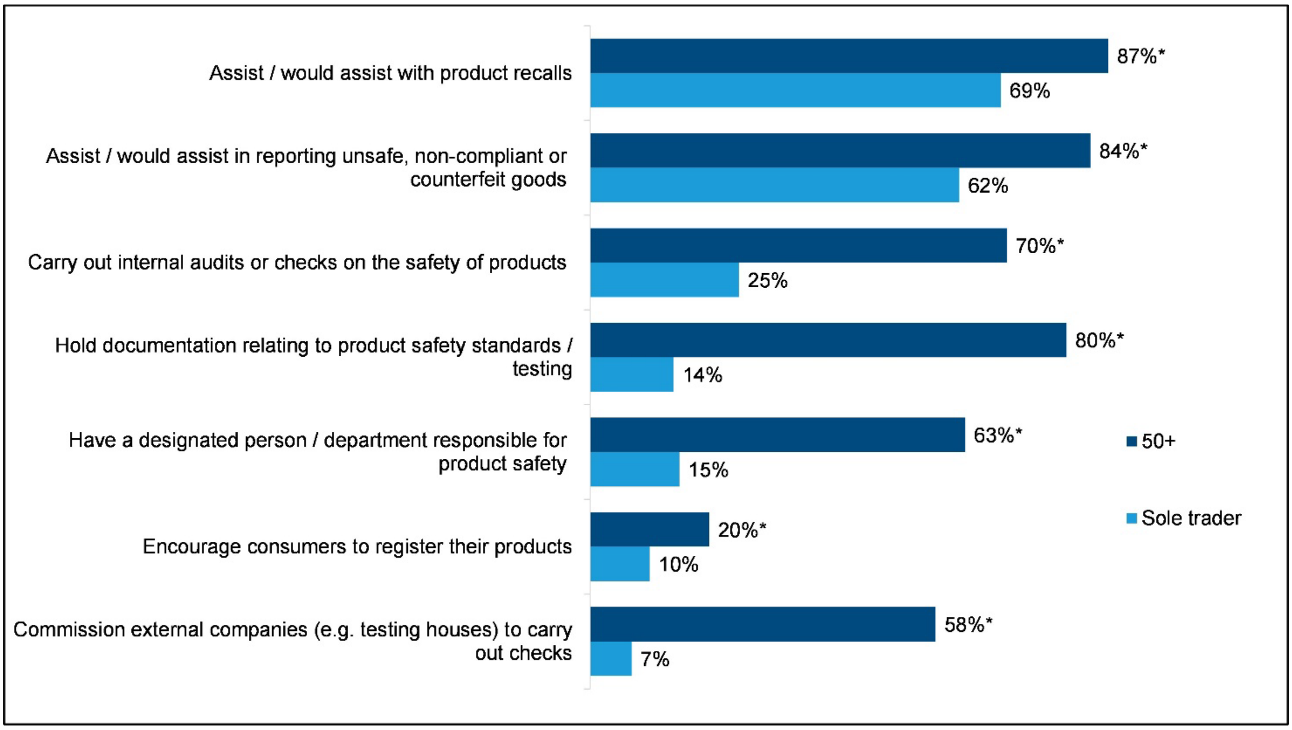
C1. Do you or your organisation do any of the following actions to ensure product safety standards…? Base: All businesses: 2024 (999); 2022 (1000). * Indicates significant difference between 2024 and 2022. The sum of the responses adds to more than 100% because respondents were able to give multiple responses.

There were some differences by business function and sector in the actions they would take to ensure product safety standards:

- Retailers were the most likely to say they would assist with reporting unsafe, non-compliant or counterfeit goods to the required authorities (68% vs 65% overall);
- Manufacturers were most likely to carry out internal audits and checks on the safety of products (45% vs 30% overall); and
- Fulfilment service providers were most likely to hold documentation relating to product safety standards / testing such as technical files (53% vs 23% overall).

As shown in Figure 5.2, Large and medium sized businesses, with more than 50 employees, were more likely than sole traders to take each type of action to ensure product safety. This is in line with findings from 2022 and 2020.

Figure 5.2 Actions taken to ensure product safety standards, by business size



C1. Do you or your organisation…? Base: Businesses with 50 or more employees (124), Sole traders (125). The sum of the responses adds to more than 100% because respondents were able to give multiple responses.

Use of risk assessments

Organisations interviewed in the qualitative research were asked about their use of risk assessments. Their take up was mixed. A small number, commonly manufacturers, conducted risk assessments as part of day-to-day practice, while most did not conduct any. Even among manufacturers, risk assessment on the lifecycle of the product was limited, and often involved testing within the factory, or guidelines for installation.

"They do risk assessments while they are making their machinery and also when it is formally installed onsite for a customer." – **Manufacturer, Small**

Furthermore, among businesses that reported conducting risk assessments, safety of staff was assessed as commonly as safety of products.

“For handling glass, I would need protective eyewear. It's mostly protecting myself...” – **Retailer & Distributor, Sole trader**

A few organisations mentioned that they did not conduct risk assessments and instead relied on their supplier or manufacturer to conduct safety assessments on their products.

“If you buy Pirelli tyres for a Ford, you don’t assess the risk—you assume Ford has done their tests.” – **Manufacturer, Micro**

Some businesses said they had protocols in place to ensure safety but were unsure whether this consisted of risk assessments or not.

“We have the correct equipment to test product safety. I guess you could put that down as a risk assessment." – **Manufacturer, Micro**

Among the businesses that did carry out formal risk assessments, these were often undertaken by trained staff and ensured that products were safe and could be used as expected.

"[We have] a number of tests that need to be carried out to ensure everything is safe to use and works as we expect it to... this is all documented. Risk assessments undertaken by formally trained engineers” – **Manufacturer, Small**

A number of the retailers interviewed said that risk assessments were not carried out in their business, but that they viewed this as standard practice within their industry.

5.2 Product registration

Business engagement with product registration

As already shown in figure 5.1, the level of engagement among businesses with product registration was low, with just over one in ten (13%) businesses encouraging registration. Businesses in the electronics sector were significantly more likely than average to encourage their customers to register their products (25% vs 13%).

There was also variation by business size and function. As previously shown in Figure 5.2, sole traders were less likely to encourage consumers to register their products than large and medium sized businesses (10% vs. 20%). By function, installers were most likely to encourage consumers to register their products (50%) and least likely were manufacturers themselves (6%).

Few of the organisations interviewed in the qualitative discussions had experience with product registrations. Some organisations were confused as to what registration was or assumed that this was done without their involvement.

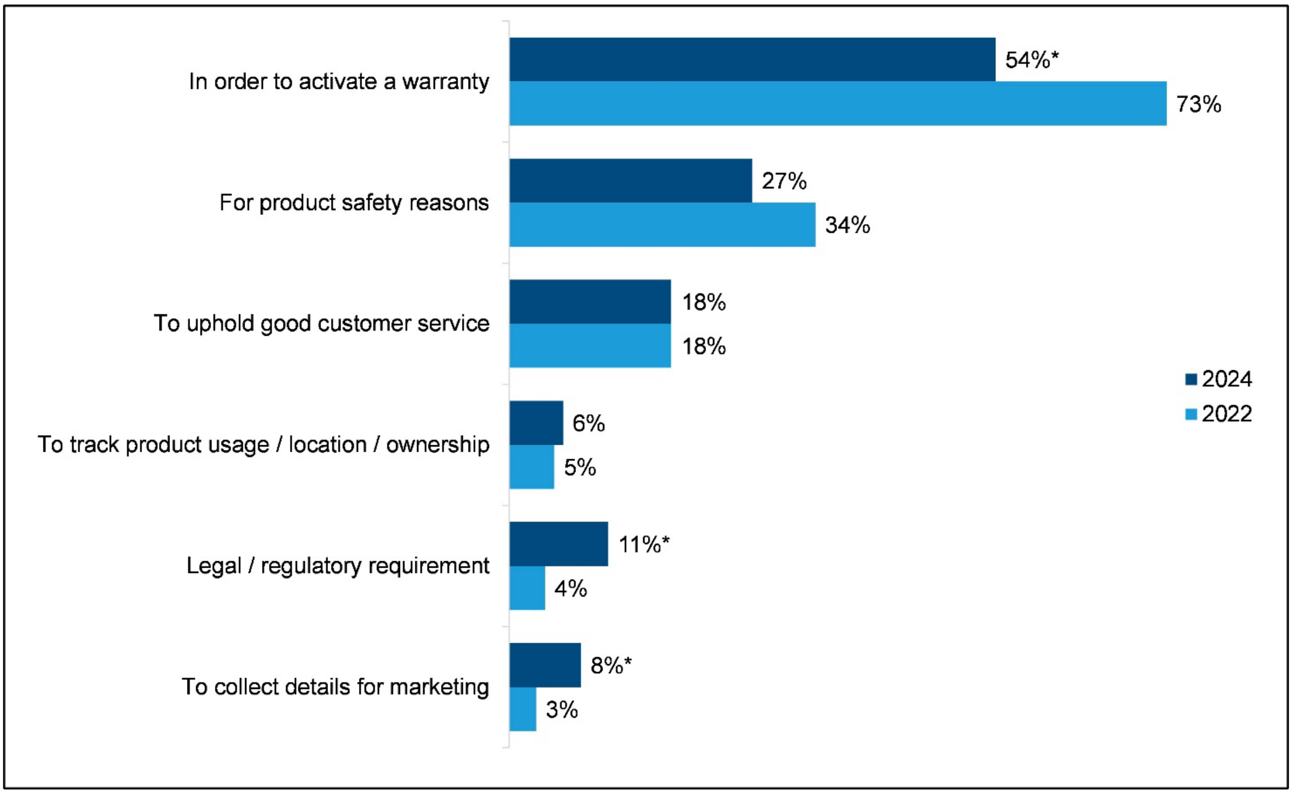
"Is it about batch labelling? I think that every product and batch label need[s] to be recorded and that there needs to be an electronic process for this but I’m unsure if this is registration.” – **Manufacturer, Small**

Reasons for encouraging product registration

Businesses who encouraged consumers to register their products were asked, without prompted options, why they do so.

The most common reason for encouraging consumers to register their products was in order to activate a warranty (54%), though this had fallen significantly since 2022 (73%). The second most common reason was for product safety reasons (27%), followed by upholding good customer service (18%). One in ten (11%) businesses said they encouraged consumers to register because of a legal or regulatory requirement, a significant rise from 4% in 2022. Additionally, 8% of businesses said they encouraged consumers to register for marketing, a significant rise from 3% in 2022.

Figure 5.3 Reasons for encouraging consumers to register their products



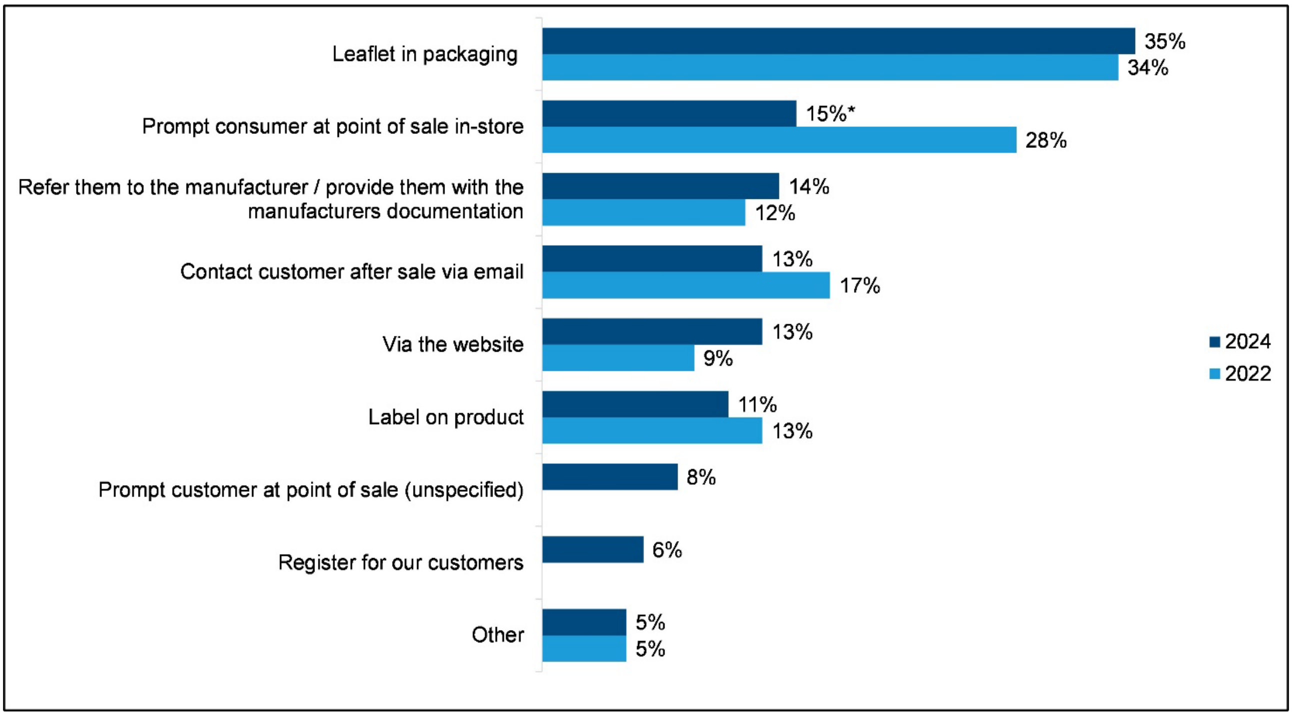
C3. Why does your business encourage consumers to register their products? Base: All businesses who encourage consumers to register products: 2024: (156); 2022 (174). The sum of the responses adds to more than 100% because respondents were able to give multiple responses.

There were some significant differences by business function. Retailers were the most likely group to encourage registration in order to uphold good customer service (27% vs. 18% overall), while manufacturers were most likely to state collecting details for marketing was a reason for encouraging consumers to register their products (54% vs 8% overall).

As seen in Figure 5.4, businesses encouraged consumers to register their products in several ways. Around a third (35%) of businesses that encouraged customers to register their products did so by putting a leaflet in the packaging, in line with findings from 2022. The second most common means of encouragement was prompting the consumer at point of sale in-store (15%), though this had decreased significantly 28% in 2022. This fall could be explained by 8% of businesses saying they prompted customers at the point of sale but did not specify where (8%).

There were no other significant differences by year. Similar proportions of businesses referred consumers to manufacturers (14% 2024 vs 12% 2022); contacted customers after sale via email (13% vs 17%) and put labels on their products (11% vs 13%).

Figure 5.4 Ways of encouraging consumers to register their products



C2. You mention that your business encourages consumers to register their product. How do you do this? Base: All businesses who encourage consumers to register products: 2024: (156); 2022 (174). Some labels show no data for 2022 because these responses were not given in this survey. The sum of the responses adds to more than 100% because respondents were able to give multiple responses.

Retailers were most likely to prompt consumers at the point of sale in-store (24% vs 15% overall), while businesses that sold button batteries were more likely than average to contact the customer after sale via email (28% vs 13% overall). There were no significant differences by business size.

5.3 Product recalls

Most organisations interviewed qualitatively had not been involved in a product recall and did not have a process in place if one was required. Some assumed that it would be other organisations, specifically manufacturers, that would be in charge of organising the recall.

"I mean we're talking clothing (obviously), so if a product was found to be at fault and therefore a risk, I would assume that it would be recalled by the manufacturer probably; or maybe through the wholesalers, and maybe in fact then through me, if I had supplied a product." – **Retailer, Sole trader**

Among those that had conducted a recall these were generally one offs and while some had specific protocols in place, others had undertaken the process in an ad hoc manner.

"If there's a fault with any of our kits, we send out a replacement part or a whole kit…but it's usually about missing items rather than safety." – **Manufacturer, Micro**

"I have recalled picture frames in the past. I just literally contacted the customers. One (customer) had managed to knock two of them off of a wall down the stairs and they broke, and I was like, Hmm, that's not good" – **Manufacturer, Sole trader**

One retailer and distributor said that a manufacturer had issued a recall to them, so they just collected the items and sent them back to the manufacturer. They did not go as far to recall products from customers they had already sold the product to.

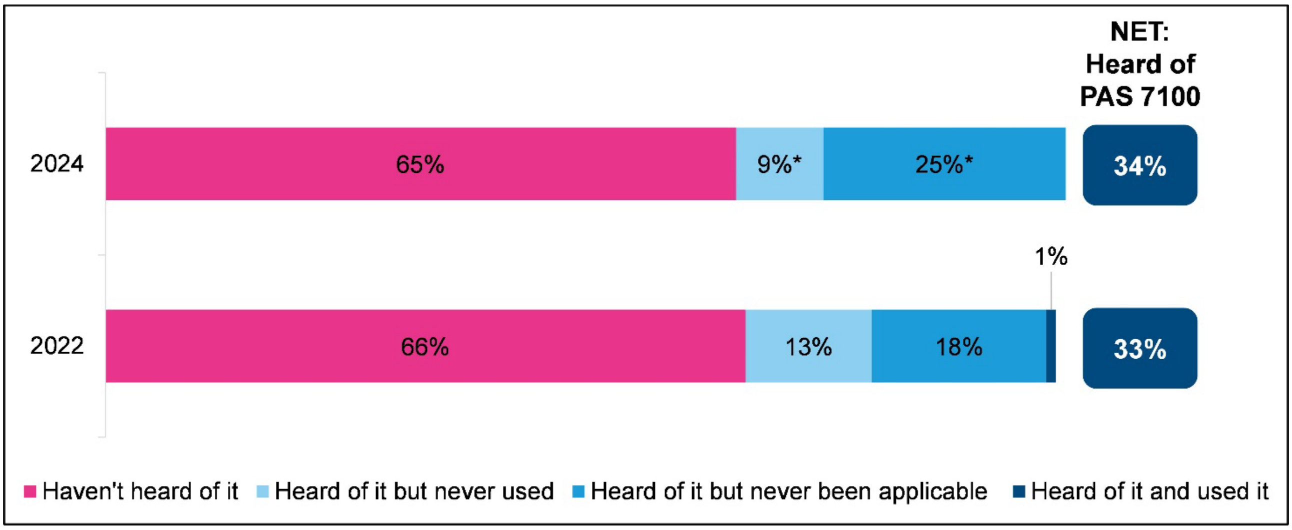
"I just had to collect everything up that I had, box them up and send them back to the company that issued the recall. I don't recall having to contact any customers during the process. I feel it'd be very difficult trying to remember who's brought all the products. However, if anything was that bad or serious, would put up a poster in the window and put up a post on Facebook" – **Retail and distribution, Small**

Most organisations interviewed had little or no direct experience with product recalls, often assuming responsibility lay with manufacturers, and where recalls had occurred, they were typically one-off, informal, or limited in scope.

Awareness of PAS Code of Practice (Supporting Better Product Recalls)

PAS 7100:2018 Code of Practice (Supporting Better Product Recalls) provides guidance for businesses and regulators on preparing for, managing, and executing consumer product safety recalls and corrective actions. This helps to ensure that unsafe products are removed. As shown in Figure 5.5, around a third (34%) of businesses had heard of this code of practice. This is in line with 2022 (33%) and remains lower than in 2020 (39%). Less than 1% of businesses had used it.

Figure 5.5 Awareness of PAS 7100 Code of Practice



B10. Which of the following statements most closely applies to your awareness of Publicly Available Specification (PAS) 7100: Code of Practice on consumer product safety related recalls and other corrective actions? Base: All businesses: 2024: (999); 2022 (1000). Percentages shown in figures are rounded to the nearest whole number, therefore the sum of individual percentages shown in figures does not always match the net total.

By business function, importers were more likely than other business functions to have heard of PAS 7100 (57%). However, this finding should be treated with caution due to the low base size of importers (30).

By sector, businesses in the clothing industry were most likely to have heard of PAS 7100 (57% vs 34% overall), and by size, large and medium sized businesses were also more likely to have heard of the standard (59%). Businesses that were online-only were also more likely than instore-only businesses to have heard of PAS 7100 (53% compared to 29%).

Among the 8 businesses who had used PAS 7100, 4 had taken some action as a result. [27] Among these 4:

- 2 had built or incorporated robust processes and procedures to recall stock or ensure unsafe products were taken off sale promptly;
- 2 had put corrective action processes in place; and
- 1 had established processes to investigate a potential product safety issue.

The remaining 4 businesses were unsure about what action their business had taken.

Challenges to a successful product recall

One Trade Association which had been involved in several recalls explained that one of the challenges was that product alerts on the OPSS website do not include information about the number of products impacted.

"How many sold - was it 4 or 400,000? I think .... more detail would be more compelling for people to take action." – **Trade Association**

Trade Associations also mentioned that companies which have not been involved in a recall before often do not know the scale of the requirements.

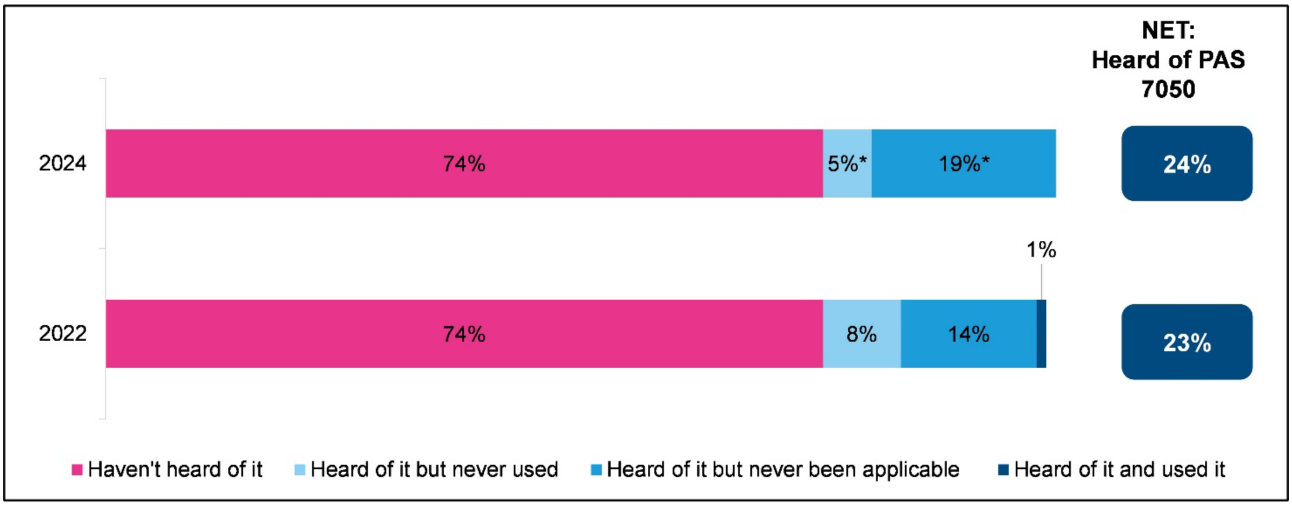
"The biggest problem with corrective action is that if a company hasn't done a recall before, they might not realise the scale of what needs doing. ...We've raised that it would be useful to have some information on lessons learned - both on the recall /incident side and why it happened in the first place." – **Trade Association**

5.4 Awareness of other codes of practice

PAS 7050:2022, Bringing Safe Products to Market, is a UK code of practice that provides guidance for businesses on best practices to ensure the safety of consumer goods before they are placed on the market. Around a quarter (24%) of businesses had heard of this code of practice, a similar proportion to 2022 (23%).

[27] Unweighted values reported, rather than percentages, due to small base size.

Figure 5.6 Awareness of PAS 7050 Code of Practice (Bringing safe goods to the market)



B12. Which of the following statements most closely applies to your awareness of Publicly Available Specification (PAS) 7050: Bringing safe goods to the market? Base: All businesses 2024 (999); 2022 (1000). Percentages shown in figures are rounded to the nearest whole number, therefore the sum of individual percentages shown in figures does not always match the net total.

Awareness of PAS 7050 was highest among businesses that provided any fulfilment services (34% vs. 24% of all businesses) and lower among businesses that did any installing (16%) or wholesaling (18%). Awareness also increased by business size, with 44% of large or medium sized businesses aware, compared to 23% of sole traders. As with PAS7100, businesses that were online only were more likely than those that were in store only to have heard of PAS 7050 (39% vs 20%).

5.5 Mitigating the risks of button batteries

Businesses were asked about whether they were aware of guidelines relating to button or coin batteries, and specific actions they take to mitigate the risks of these batteries in their products.

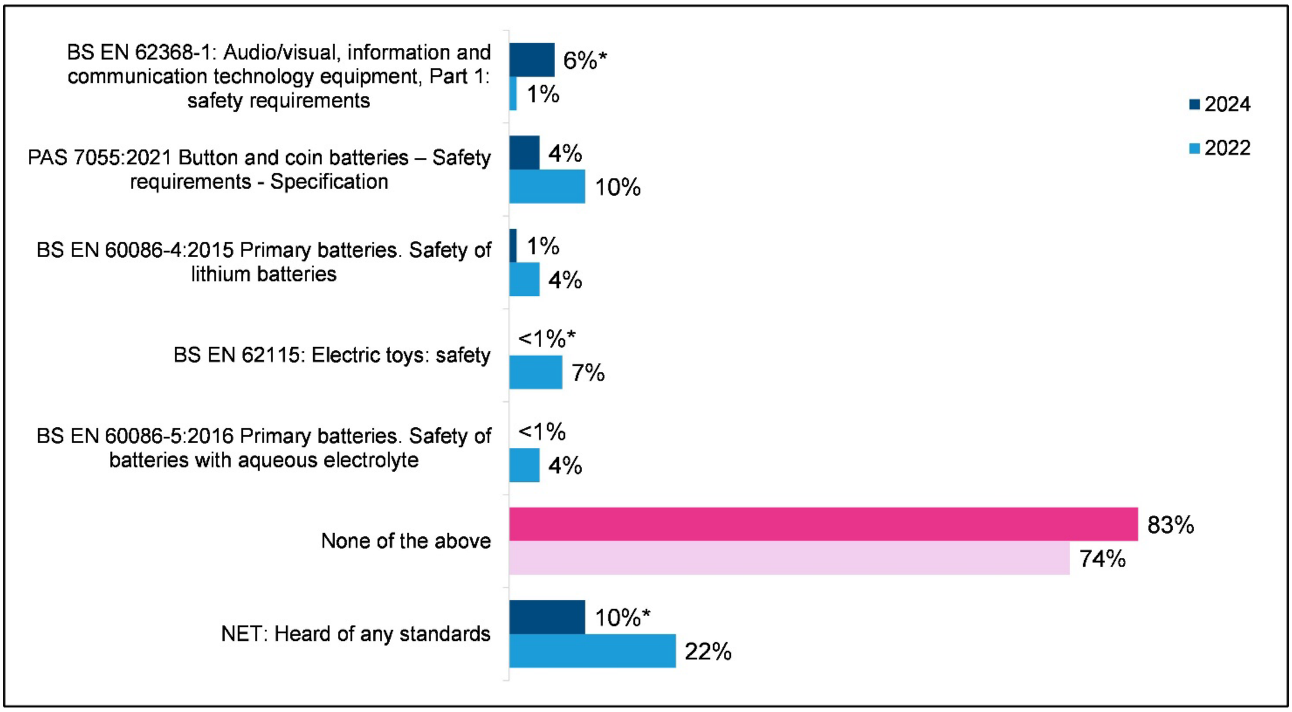
Slightly more than one in ten (12%) businesses dealt with products that were powered by button or coin batteries, a similar number to 2022 (10%). Among businesses who had handled products containing button or coin batteries, awareness of requirements was low and had fallen since 2022.

When prompted with a list of requirements[28], only 10% of businesses who had handled button or coin batteries had heard of at least one of the requirements. This is shown in Figure 5.7. Despite this fall, there was an increase in the proportion of businesses that had heard of BS EN 62368-1: Audio/visual, information and communication technology equipment, Part 1: safety requirements (6% compared to 1% in 2022).

Prior to the interviewer prompting, none of the businesses were able to spontaneously cite any of the listed requirements.

[28] Button battery requirements covered in the survey were: BS EN 62368-1 (Audio/visual, information and communication technology equipment, Part 1); PAS 7055:2021 (Button and coin batteries – Safety requirements – Specification); BS EN 60086-4:2015 (Primary batteries - Safety of lithium batteries); and BS EN 60086-5:2016)Primary batteries - Safety of batteries with aqueous electrolyte).

Figure 5.7 Awareness of standards related to button or coin batteries



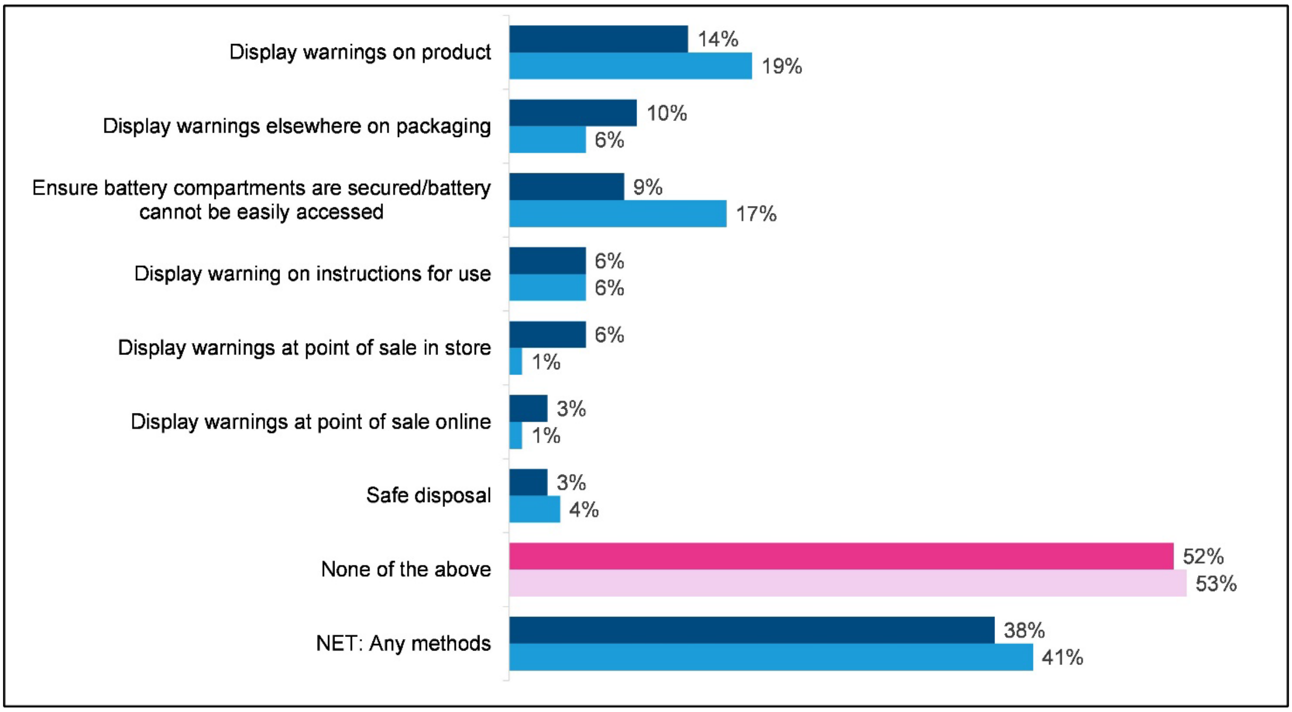
H2. And have you heard of any these safety standards relating to button or coin batteries? Base: All businesses who sell/manufacture/install/distribute/repair/products powered by button or coin batteries 2024 (129); 2022 (103). 'None of the above' responses are highlighted in pink for emphasis. The sum of the responses adds to more than 100% because respondents were able to give multiple responses.

There was some difference by business function, with retailers most likely to have heard of BS EN 62368-1 (9% vs 6% average) and manufacturers were most likely to have heard of BS EN 60086-4 (12% vs 1% average). However, this result should be treated with caution due to the low base size of manufacturers that sold products with button batteries (36).

Among all businesses who handled products containing button or coin batteries, almost four in ten (38%) took action to mitigate their risks (40% in 2022). Shown in Figure 5.8, the most common actions were to display a warning on the product (14%), display warnings elsewhere on the packaging (10%) and to ensure battery compartments are contained (9%).

Manufacturers were most likely to display warnings on the product (42% vs 14% average); however, this finding should be treated with caution due to low base size (36).

Figure 5.8. Actions taken to mitigate risks of button batteries



H3. Are there any methods in which you mitigate the safety risks of button or coin batteries in your products? Base: All businesses who sell/manufacture/install/distribute/repair/products powered by button or coin batteries 2024 (129); 2022 (103). The sum of the responses adds to more than 100% because respondents were able to give multiple responses.

5.6 Chapter 5 conclusion

This chapter highlights that, as in 2022, assisting with product recalls was the most common way in which businesses would assist with upholding product safety standards. Findings also show there has been a notable decline since 2022 in the number of businesses conducting internal audits, holding safety documentation, and commissioning external checks. Smaller organisations and sole traders were the least likely to assist in these ways. Engagement with formal risk assessments and product registration also remains limited, and awareness of relevant codes of practice such as PAS 7100 and PAS 7050 was modest, especially outside of larger or online-only businesses. Awareness and actions regarding the risks of button batteries was particularly low among those interviewed, with few businesses able to cite relevant safety standards or demonstrate proactive risk mitigation.

When considered alongside findings already discussed in chapters 3 and 4, findings from this chapter indicate there is room for further research into the needs of businesses with lower awareness of product safety requirements, including a focus on smaller businesses and those outside high-risk sectors.

Summary of actions to ensure product safety

- In comparison to previous years, to ensure product safety, fewer businesses are conducting safety audits, holding safety documentation, or commissioning external checks and audits. The most common actions taken to ensure product safety are to assist with product recalls and assist with reporting unsafe, non-compliant or counterfeit goods.
- Majority of businesses had a light touch in relation to risk assessments, and most do not perform them or have them confused with general safety procedures in the business.
- As seen in previous waves, the level of engagement among businesses with product registration was low.
- Most organisations interviewed qualitatively had not been involved in a product recall and did not have a process in place if they needed one. Some assumed that product recalls were organised by other actors, specifically manufacturers.
- Awareness of PAS 7050 and PAS 7100 remains low among businesses, with smaller businesses and those who only sell in-store having the lowest awareness.

6. Sources of support and information

In chapter 6, we present sources of information businesses use to ensure compliance with product safety requirements. In section 6.1 and 6.2, we show that most businesses would go to their suppliers for information on product safety, and that suppliers were seen as the most useful source of information. In section 6.3, we show that most businesses had enough support and guidance available to maintain high standards of product safety. In section 6.4, we show that perceptions of guidance provided by OPSS was mixed, and in section 6.5, we show there was mixed awareness and engagement with key bodies such as the British Standards Institution (BSI) and the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS).

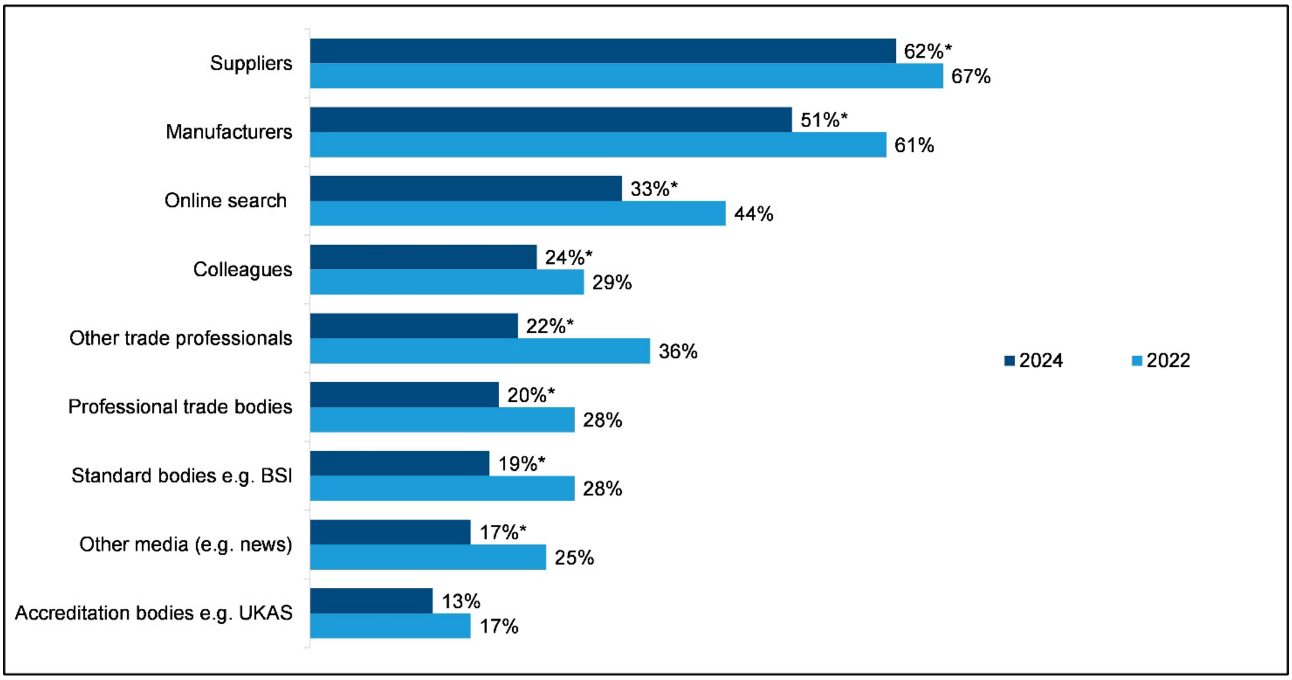
6.1 Sources of information to ensure product safety compliance

Businesses were asked what sources of information they used to ensure compliance with product safety requirements. Figure 6.1 shows that suppliers (62%), followed by manufacturers (51%) were the most common sources of information. However significantly fewer businesses in 2024 used them as sources of information than in 2022 (67% suppliers and 61% manufacturers). Four in five businesses (80%) said they used multiple sources of information to ensure compliance with product safety requirements.

Many of the sources of information mentioned by businesses in 2022 were significantly less commonly used in 2024. The biggest differences year on year were:

- Other trade professionals (22% 2024 vs 36% 2022);
- Online search (33% 2024 vs 44% 2022);
- Local Authorities / Trading Standards (23% 2024 vs 34% 2022).

Figure 6.1 Most common sources of information



D1. What sources of information do you use when ensuring you are complying with product safety requirements? Base: All businesses: 2024 (999); 2022 (1000); 2020 (1000) *Indicates significant difference between 2024 and 2022. The sum of the responses adds to more than 100% because respondents were able to give multiple responses.

There were some significant differences by business function. Installers were most likely to use manufacturers as a source of information (68% vs 51% overall). Alongside manufacturers, installers were also more likely to use online searches (49% vs 33% overall); colleagues (39% vs 24% overall) and other trade professionals (41% vs 22% overall).

Retailers were less likely to use some sources of information such as other trade professionals (19% vs 22% overall) and standards bodies (14% vs 19% overall). However, they were more likely to use media like the news (20% vs 17% overall).

The sources of information businesses used also varied by size of business. Sole traders were less likely to use any sources of information with almost a quarter (23%) stating none of these sources were applicable. Comparatively, only 1% of businesses with more than 50 employees said none of the sources of information were applicable.

Businesses that were not aware of OPSS were also more likely than those who were aware of OPSS to use none of the sources of information to ensure they were compliant with product safety requirements (20% vs 10%). A similar trend could be seen in other forms of product safety awareness; of those who responded they had not used any source of information:

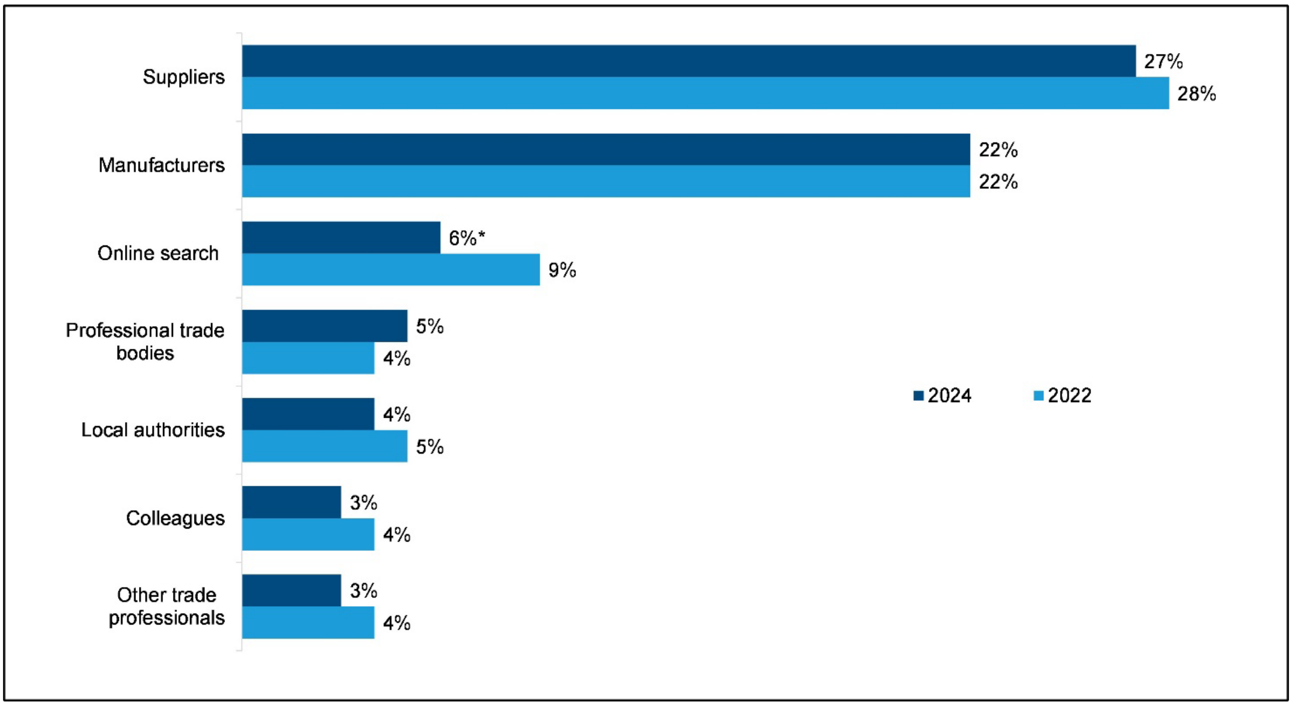
- 20% had not interacted with their Local Authority (compared with 8% who had);
- 20% were unaware of Primary Authority Partnerships (compared with 4% who were aware); and
- 21% did not encourage customers to register products (compared with 1% who did).

6.2 Most useful sources of information

As well as being the most common sources of information, suppliers (27%), followed by manufacturers (22%) were cited by businesses as being the most useful source of information to ensure compliance with product safety requirements.

As shown in Figure 6.2 there has been a steady decrease in the number of businesses saying that online searches were a useful source of information (6% vs 9% in 2022 and 14% in 2020), although this remains the third most cited. It is possible that the reduction of online searches as a useful source of information may be a result of an increased use of AI. AI searches were not included as a code in this year’s research, but this could be an avenue to explore in future research.

Figure 6.2 Most useful source of information to ensure product safety compliance



D1/D2. Most useful source of information to ensure compliance. Base: All businesses: 2024 (999); 2022 (1000). Responses <3% have not been included.

All business functions, except installers, named suppliers as the most useful source of information. Installers named manufacturers as the most useful source of information (49%). By size, sole traders were more likely than average to say online searches were the most useful source of information (8% vs 6% average). Those with more than 50 employees were significantly more likely to say the following were useful:

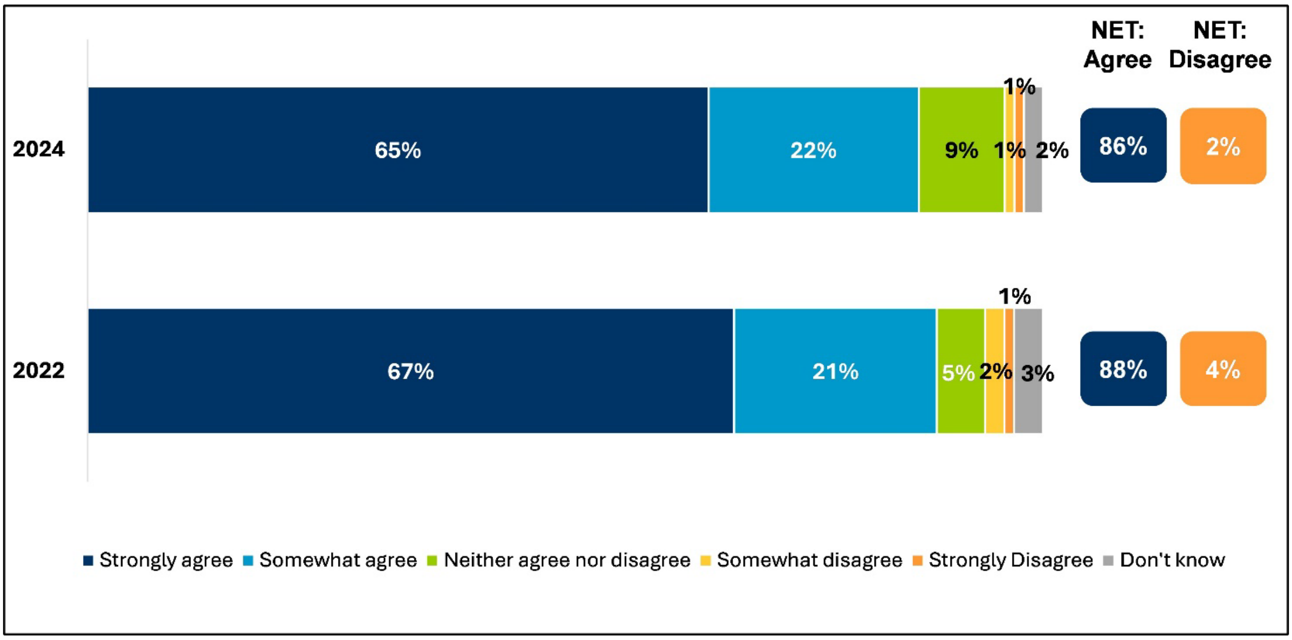
- Professional trade bodies (13% vs 5% overall);
- Local Authorities (10% vs 4% overall);
- OPSS (12% vs 1% overall).

6.3 Perceptions of support and guidance available

Businesses were asked whether they agreed that they had the support and guidance they need to ensure product safety, the results are shown in Figure 6.3. The vast majority (86%) of businesses somewhat or strongly agreed, in line with the findings from 2022.

By businesses function, fulfilment service providers were least likely to agree (78% vs 86% of all businesses) that they had all the support and guidance they needed.

Figure 6.3 To what extent businesses agree they have all the support and guidance they need



D4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that 'I have all the support and guidance I need within my organisation to ensure that products we manufacture / sell / install / distribute are safe'? Base: All businesses: 2024 (999); 2022 (1000). Percentages shown in figures are rounded to the nearest whole number, therefore the sum of individual percentages shown in figures does not always match the net total.

Most organisations interviewed qualitatively also felt that they had the support and resources they needed. For example, a Local Authority employee said they were grateful for financial support from OPSS covering the cost of sampling and accessing to British Standards Online.

"They [OPSS] do have a pot of money for the sampling and covering sampling costs, which is great because we haven't got that within our budgets…. We haven't got any funds for testing. So, without that we couldn't test anything… They've also fair play to them, arranged access to British standards online for us, so we can all access the standards that things should be made in compliance with. Again, excellent, because otherwise we'd be struggling, and we can't really afford to fork out for a copy from the library every time we need to check something." – **Local Authority**

They also highlighted the Product Safety Database and knowledge hub groups hosted by OPSS as helpful sources of information.

Only 23 businesses in the quantitative survey disagreed that they had all the support and guidance they needed to ensure their products were safe. These businesses were asked what further information or support they would like, and the most common response (provided by 5 businesses) was better awareness of what the safety standards are.

6.4 Use of OPSS guidance

A small number of the organisations that were interviewed qualitatively had used OPSS guidance. These organisations were asked to whether they had found the information they were looking for and how clear it was for them to understand. There were mixed responses from organisations on how useful this guidance was. It is worth noting that some organisations may have used OPSS guidance when searching for information on product safety, but were unaware that it was coming from OPSS, because it is found on the GOV.UK website.

One retailer felt that OPSS guidance was useful in reassuring them that they were doing the right thing, but it was also noted that this information could have come from supplier or manufacturers websites. Another retailer felt the guidance was useful as a starting point but could have provided some more solutions.

"You get the general product safety standards but then you have to go and find what you actually have to do…" – **Retailer / distributor, Small**

A small number felt that guidance was not comprehensive enough, citing issues they had faced that they could not find guidance on.

“We had installed some piping that reacted badly with paint chemicals, once we discovered what the issue was, we moved the pipe which was able to deal with the chemicals, but there There’s no standard safety guidance that could deal with it. It should have been picked up, but nothing was written down to give guidance." – ***Retailer / distributor, Small***

Similarly, one installer struggled to find information on whether a product lacking a proper mains lead was legal to sell in its current condition. After looking through OPSS guidance, they found no definitive answer but decided to discard the improper leads and replace them with their own.

"Several things skirting around it... but nothing that categorically said this should be included or is not allowed." **– Installer, Micro**

One of the Local Authorities interviewed argued that guidance was not sufficiently clear or concise, which could lead to confusion as to what the required actions were.

"You tend to find with some of the guidance that are produced [by OPSS]. They're actually longer than the original regulations and more difficult to read, not helpful." **– Local Authority**

Across different industries, some businesses argued that OPSS information lacked definitive clarity. One Trade Association mentioned that an archive of previous versions of guidance was not available on the website which could lead to issues. For example, a company may not be able to provide evidence for a claim where they have followed previous guidance, as there was no record of this. Additionally, a suggestion was made to make the website more user friendly for businesses looking for guidance in the first instance.

“There could be a simpler, 'starter' piece to help with innovation for someone with a simple product that they want to bring to market. e.g. before you start, you need X, Y, Z.." – **Trade Association**

Feedback from Local Authorities

The Local Authorities interviewed in the qualitative research would have liked OPSS to be more responsive to queries regarding their guidance. It is worth noting that this feedback may not be reflective of all Local Authority Trading Standards.

One mentioned that they have coordinated their own informal networks to share information on product safety, but argued this was the kind of work OPSS should be doing.

They also said that OPSS appeared to be under-resourced to provide adequate liaison support to answer queries in a timely manner or attend meetings that concern bigger product safety issues.

"They should be there and they're not. You ask them to attend training. They won't. You ask them for a comment on something they don't want to comment." **– Local Authority**

One Local Authority flagged that staff were difficult to reach, particularly when they felt it was necessary to receive a tailored comment on how legislation should be applied.

"You can never get to talk to anyone in a particular department who might have specific knowledge... everything gets funnelled through this one point of contact... But what we would like is for them to give their interpretation and opinion on the legislation and what you get back is well, this is what the legislation says... but we know what the legislation says. That's not the issue. It's how it's interpreted. And if the national regulator can't give us an opinion, it's left to each individual authority and that's not going to wash with businesses." – **Local Authority**

They also argued that OPSS were not proactive and could do more to advance product safety in the UK more broadly.

"I'd expect them to be looking at issues, identifying stuff and letting us know, right? We need to be on the lookout for this. Anyone comes across this and when people flag stuff up that they actually take an active interest and offer support." – **Local Authority**

6.5 Interaction with key bodies

British Standards Institution (BSI)

There were mixed levels of awareness of BSI amongst organisations. Some were not aware, others were unsure if the standards[29] applied to them, and a few had never interacted with BSI. Some organisations did interact more closely with BSI and understood the standards to be strictly upheld in their industry.

"I would think British Standards would certainly [apply] further down the line, I mean at my level, probably not, but in terms of the garment supply and the material and supply, yeah, the manufacturer acting side of it, they would." – **Retailer, Sole Trader**

[29] Due to respondents' level of knowledge of technical terms, references to standards in section 6.5 may refer to requirements in places.

One Trade Association who worked closely with BSI internationally felt the standards may not be as strict.

"The standards are quasi-mandatory but there is a presumption of conformity if you've tested." – **Trade Association**

United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS)

There was less awareness amongst manufacturers of the United Kingdom Accreditation System (UKAS) meaning most organisations were unable to make any comment on this. Only a small number of organisations said that they had interacted with it in the past, but these commented that UKAS standards were upheld well within their industry. One business that had interacted with UKAS felt that the standards were difficult to apply.

"[Standards are] very strict, sometimes too strict" – **Manufacturer, Micro**

Standards overall were thought to be upheld well throughout all industries. Some organisations thought that standards were on the stricter side, but that there were no particular gaps in guidance. Those manufacturers that did mention guidance being too strict also had some concerns about the cost of tested components that would be compliant with guidance.

6.6 Chapter 6 conclusion

Chapter 6 reveals that suppliers and manufacturers remain the most commonly used and valued sources of information for product safety compliance, though their usage has declined since 2022. While most businesses used multiple sources, reliance on key channels such as trade professionals, online searches, and Local Authorities has decreased, with sole traders particularly less likely to seek any information. Businesses with lower awareness of OPSS or limited engagement with regulatory bodies were also less likely to access compliance resources.

Feedback on OPSS guidance was mixed, though it is worth noting that only a small number of businesses said they had used OPSS guidance. While many found it useful as a starting point or for reassurance, some businesses noted a lack of definitive clarity and practical solutions, particularly for niche or complex issues. Local Authorities mentioned OPSS' responsiveness and proactivity, highlighting the need for more tailored support and better coordination to address broader product safety challenges. Additionally, there were mixed levels of awareness and engagement with other key bodies such as the British Standards Institution (BSI) and the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS), though standards were generally perceived to be upheld well.

Summary of sources of support and information

- As seen in 2022, suppliers and manufacturers remain the most used and valued sources of product safety information by businesses. However, both have seen a significant decline in their use this wave.
- Larger businesses and those who have relationships with Trade Associations and bodies tend to be better informed of product safety information.
- The majority of businesses felt that they had all the information and guidance they needed to ensure the safety of their products. However, of the minority who wanted further information, most wanted there to be more awareness of what the product safety standards are.
- Businesses had mixed views on OPSS guidance, with some expressing that OPSS information lacked clarity or that they found it difficult to navigate, meaning they looked elsewhere for guidance.

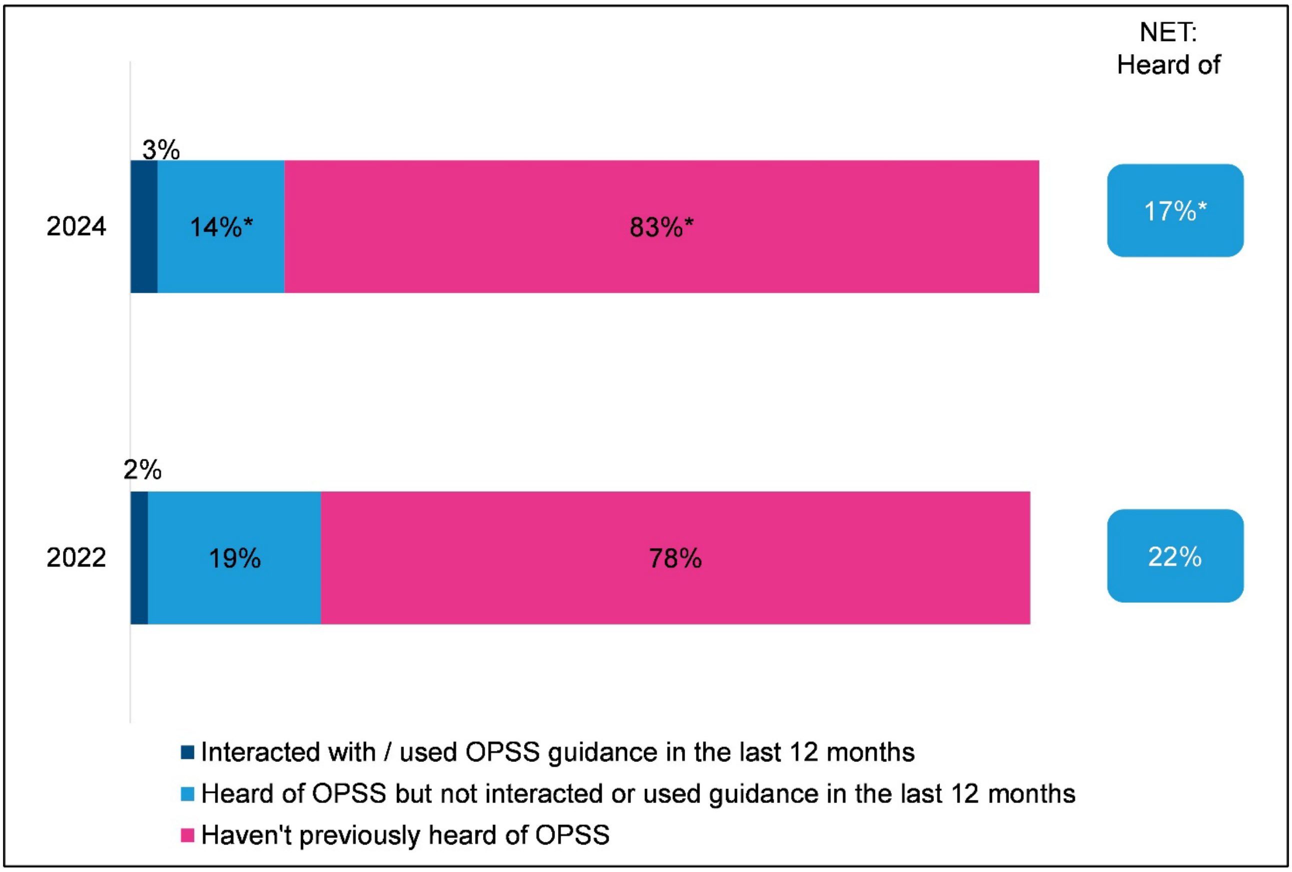
7. Awareness and understanding of OPSS

In this chapter, we explore businesses' awareness and understanding of the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS), as well as their experiences of interacting with the organisation. In section 7.1, we show that awareness of OPSS is low but varies by size. Section 7.2 shows businesses that interacted with OPSS generally had a positive experience. Finally, in section 7.3, we show that there was a mixed understanding among businesses of the role of OPSS, while Trade Associations and Local Authorities generally had a clear understanding.

7.1 Awareness of OPSS

Businesses were asked whether they had interacted with or heard of OPSS. As shown in Figure 7.1, awareness of OPSS was low, with over four fifths (83%) of businesses having not heard of OPSS. The proportion of businesses who had heard of OPSS has decreased significantly from 2022 (17% vs. 22% in 2022) but remained higher than awareness in 2020 (13%).

Figure 7.1. Awareness of OPSS



B1. Which of the following statements most closely applies to your awareness of the Office of Product Safety and Standards (OPSS)? Base: All businesses: 2024 (999); 2022 (1000). Percentages shown in figures are rounded to the nearest whole number, therefore the sum of individual percentages shown in figures does not always match the net total.

There was some correlation between awareness of OPSS and business size. Large and medium sized businesses were most likely to have heard of OPSS (40%), whereas sole traders (14%), and micro business (18%) were least likely.

This finding was also reflected in the qualitative interviews, where sole traders and micro businesses generally demonstrated lower awareness of OPSS. Small and micro businesses tended to have higher awareness than sole traders but lacked an exact understanding of OPSS' role and how they can support with product safety.

"No awareness…but then no-one has heard of the Fine Arts Trade Guild, either I suspect." – **Retailer, Micro**

"I've heard of it but I'm not knowledgeable." – **Retailer, Small**

Trade Associations and Local Authority Trading standards that were interviewed demonstrated a more detailed understanding of OPSS. They had all worked alongside OPSS in one capacity or another.

"As part of my role, I attend National Product Safety Group. So obviously OPSS attend that and give us some updates on what they're doing, and we will feedback within each region as to any projects that we're doing or any issues that we have or any queries that might need to be discussed or particular products or legislation." – **Local Authority**

7.2 Interaction with OPSS

A small proportion of businesses surveyed had interacted with OPSS in the last 12 months (2%). Of these 15 businesses who had interacted with OPSS:

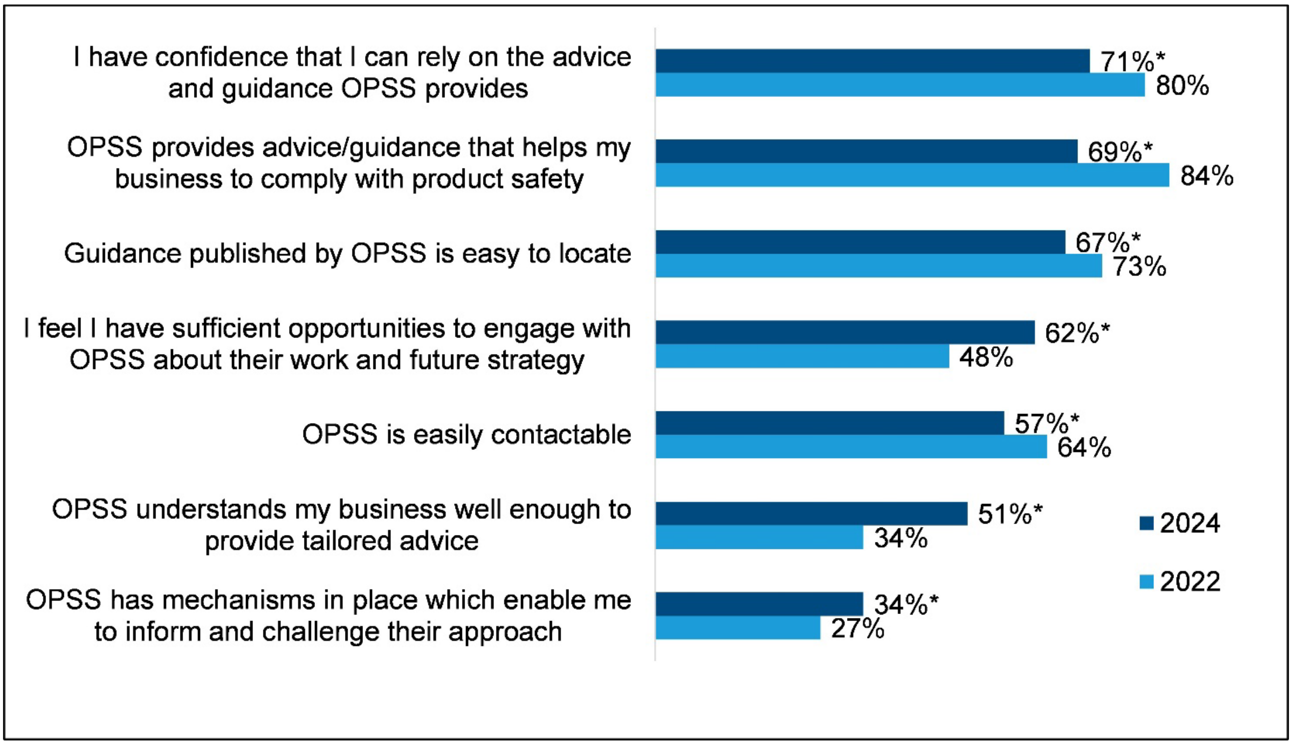
- 7 sought advice on complying with product safety legislation;
- 3 sought advice regarding the appropriate use of product safety-related standards;
- 3 were complying with a legal requirement e.g. registering products in the UK;
- 2 reported a dangerous or faulty product;
- 2 sought other advice or guidance;
- 1 reported a counterfeit product on the market; and
- 2 sought support with something else.

Overall, 3% of businesses had either interacted with OPSS or used their guidance in the last 12 months. Figure 7.2 shows the opinions of those businesses that had worked with OPSS in the last 12 months. These findings should be treated with caution due to the small number of businesses that were asked this question (40). Businesses that had interacted with OPSS were typically positive about their experience, and there were no significant changes in opinions between 2024 and 2022.

Of the businesses that had interacted with OPSS (71%) were confident they could rely on the advice and guidance OPSS provides. A similar proportion (69%) agreed that OPSS provides advice and guidance that helps their business comply with product safety legislation.

At the other end of the spectrum, just over half of businesses surveyed agreed that OPSS understood their business well enough to provide advice that is tailored to their circumstances (51%). Meanwhile, one third (34%) agreed that OPSS had mechanisms in place which enabled businesses to inform and challenge their approach.

Figure 7.2 Opinion on OPSS and the guidance it provides.

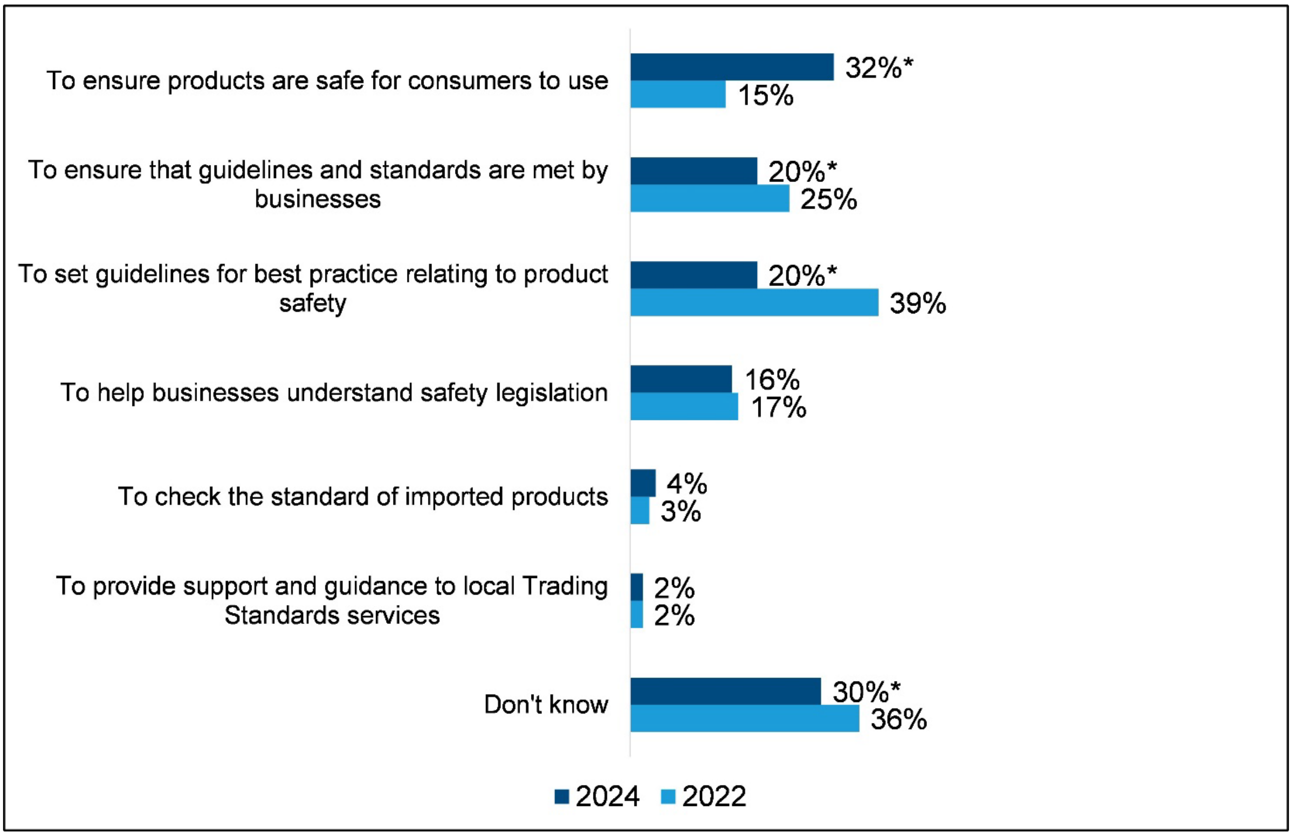


B4_x. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: Businesses who have interacted with OPSS or used their guidance within the last 12 months: 2024 (40); 2022 (45). Caution, low base sizes. Significance testing was not conducted for the results shown because the base size of both groups is below 50. The sum of the responses adds to more than 100% because respondents were able to give multiple responses.

7.3 Understanding of OPSS' role

Businesses that were aware of OPSS were asked what they understood the role of OPSS to be, the results of which are displayed in Figure 7.3. The most common understanding of OPSS' role was to ensure products are safe for consumers (32%). This is significantly higher than in 2022 (15%). The most common understanding of OPSS' role in 2022 was setting guidelines for best practice relating to product safety, however only 20% of businesses mentioned this in 2024, a significant decrease (39% in 2022). Additionally, another one in five (20%) businesses felt that OPSS' role was to ensure guidelines and standards are met by businesses (20%).

Figure 7.3 Opinion on OPSS and the guidance it provides.



B3. What do you understand the role of OPSS to be? Base: All businesses who have heard of OPSS: 2024 (221); 2022 (258). The sum of the responses adds to more than 100% because respondents were able to give multiple responses.

Three in ten (30%) businesses that had heard of OPSS did not know what OPSS' role was, a fall from 36% in 2022. There were no significant differences between sub-groups for those who did not know the role of OPSS.

Organisations interviewed qualitatively had a similarly mixed understanding of OPSS' role. Some showed a good knowledge, while many others had vague responses and showed limited understanding.

"I think their role is to ensure that products available in the UK are at a suitable standard and safe to use" **– Retailer, Sole trader**

"I'm guessing like a governing body to ensure that companies that say they worked to specific standards, you know, and that are supplying products which can affect the public meet the requirements of what they say it is" **– Manufacturer, Small**

7.4 Local Authorities and Trade Associations

The Trade Association interviewed had a high awareness of OPSS and works regularly and proactively with OPSS to advise on their specific industry. They expressed feeling uncertainty regarding European legislation and how it will be adopted into the UK following the EU exit.

“OPSS are the regulator in pretty much most products placed in the UK market… They’re the go-to organisation” – **Trade Association**

The Trade Association noted that it felt one of its key roles within its relationship with OPSS was to interpret and disseminate key guidance and regulation changes to its members.

Local Authorities interviewed also had a high awareness of OPSS, noting that they view them as *“central regulators”* and described working with OPSS regularly in their role of enforcing regulations laid out by OPSS. Local Authorities mentioned their view that that OPSS had more budget for covering testing and sampling costs.

“*…*which is great because we haven't got that within our budgets. We used to have a pot [of money] for samples and testing. [Now] we haven't got any funds for testing. *"* – **Local Authority**

However, some Local Authorities felt that like themselves, OPSS were under resourced and are not able to provide the support that they require. One Local Authority said that OPSS were unresponsive and lacking in support, another mentioned they expected more from collaborative engagement, that helps to identify issues early.

“I'd expect them to be looking at issues, identifying stuff and letting us know, right? We need to be on the lookout for this. Anyone comes across this and when people flag stuff up that they actually take an active interest and offer support." – **Local Authority**

Additionally, a few Local Authorities mentioned that OPSS provided numerous resources, including webinars and guides. However, they tended to feel that interpretation of the legislation and guidance was up to the individual Local Authority, leading to inconsistency in the way different authorities approach situations.

7.5 Chapter 7 conclusion

The findings from Chapter 7 reveal that awareness of the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) remains low among businesses, particularly smaller ones such as sole traders and micro-businesses. Larger businesses demonstrated higher awareness and more frequent engagement. General engagement was low, though those who have interacted with the organisation generally reported positive experiences.

Local Authorities, while recognising OPSS’ central role, highlighted resource constraints and inconsistent support as barriers to effective collaboration. These findings can inform future research into engagement between OPSS and business in the product safety space.

Summary of the awareness and understanding of OPSS

- Awareness of OPSS was low across all sectors, with less than a fifth having heard of OPSS.
- Although interaction with OPSS is rare among businesses, of those who had engaged with OPSS their experience was generally positive, and most had interacted with OPSS to seek advice on complying with product safety legislation.
- Majority of businesses trust and utilise OPSS guidance, however, some felt that it was not always easily accessible, and others believed it was not specific enough for their business function.
- Of the businesses who had heard of OPSS, the understanding of OPSS' role was mixed, with just under a third unsure of what OPSS do, even though they had heard of them.

8. The role of Local Authorities

This chapter examines the role of Local Authorities in ensuring product safety. Firstly, in section 8.1 we show how Local Authorities play a critical role in providing advice, conducting audits, and enforcing compliance, including overseeing product recalls when necessary. In section 8.2, we show that business interaction with Local Authorities remains low and, in section 8.3, we show that there remains a limited awareness and uptake of Primary Authority Partnerships, particularly among smaller businesses.

8.1 Perceptions from Local Authorities

As in previous years, Local Authorities interviewed in the qualitative research strand said they had a number of responsibilities to ensure high standards of product safety in the UK. These fell under three broad categories:

- To provide advice to businesses to support compliance;
- To monitor product safety standards through proactive methods (for example through auditing businesses and testing products on the market); and
- To enforce product safety compliance where necessary through reactive methods (for example through mandating a product safety recall).

"If they've [businesses] got a query, then we would personally look at the published guidelines. I'd look at the legislation itself, but also the guidelines to assist with any interpretation of issues, particularly around markings and what is now acceptable... or any divergent issues around that, as if there are divergent issues, then it's very difficult to spot in the legislation itself...." – **Local Authority**

"We will also carry out routine inspections to high-risk premises and take sample of products… and just see what the results are that come back" – **Local Authority**

Local Authorities highlighted their unique role in product safety recalls; unlike actors in the product supply chain Local Authorities' ability to carry out an enforcement role when businesses are non-compliant is of key importance to the process.

Another explained that they address issues with product labelling or traceability.

"For instance, they haven't got name, address of manufacturer and that's still obviously a problem, because if something does go wrong you can't trace it back and across the supply chain. So that will be example of a non-compliance." – **Local Authority**

The role of Local Authorities in product recalls

Local Authorities interviewed explained how a number of routes are used to notify them of unsafe or non-compliant products on the market. These include:

- OPSS market surveillance;
- Report from a local business or consumer;

- Via port checks; and
- Through product testing.

Once Local Authorities have identified products that do not meet safety standards, they would speak directly to the business and ensure the product was removed from the market while investigations are undertaken. They would assess whether there was a need for a product recall by conducting a risk assessment and then provide guidance on how to conduct recalls

The methods they suggest for arraigning a product vary depending on the business in question, but they do have authority to close businesses down should they not comply.

> *"The chances are if it's unsafe, it probably is going to need a recall... we will issue Guidance on how to conduct recalls and withdrawals and engage with them and check how that they're progressing with that."* – **Local Authority**

None of the Local Authorities spoken to in the qualitative interviews had closed down a business as a result of non-compliance, one explained that this would only happen if recall responsibilities were not taken seriously.

> *"...it depends really on how seriously they take their recall responsibilities and how expensive that is. Quite often with our ones. It's not a huge amount of product that they've supplied, and if it is online then they can quite easily contact their customers.... I mean there is the potential for closing down, but we haven't really had that within our authority."* – **Local Authority**

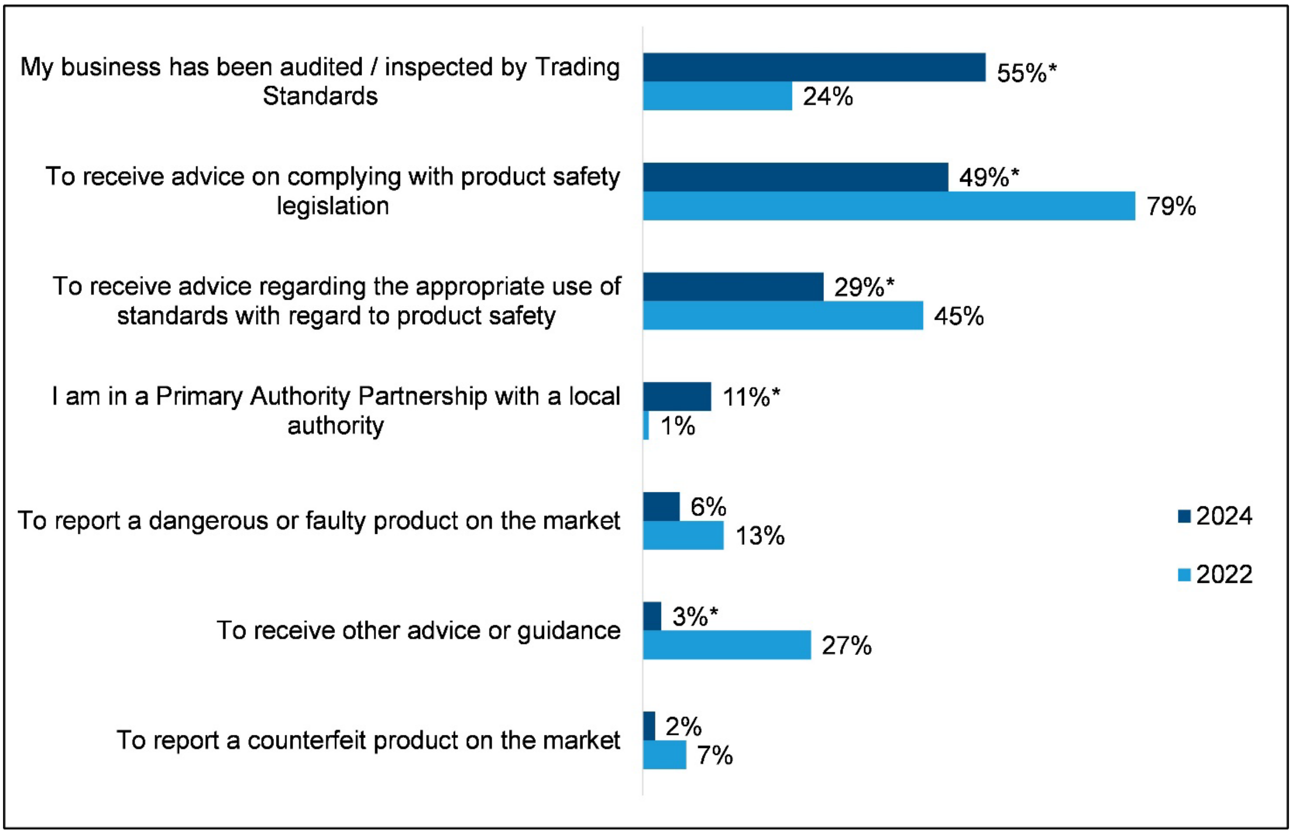
8.2 Business's interactions with Local Authorities

Among businesses surveyed, fewer than one in ten (8%) had interacted with Local Authorities regarding any product safety issues, though this was a significant increase compared to 2022, when 4% said they had interacted with Local Authorities.

Businesses with over 50 employees were more likely than smaller firms to have had interactions with Local Authorities (18% vs. 9% of sole traders, 8% of micro businesses and 5% of small businesses). Additionally, there were differences by business function with retailers most likely to have interacted with Local Authorities regarding a product safety issue (10% vs. 8% overall).

As shown in Figure 8.1, among businesses that had interacted with a Local Authority, the most common reason for this was their business had been audited or inspected by Trading Standards (55%), a significant increase in the proportion saying this from 2022 (24%). Advice on complying with product safety legislation was the second most common reason (49%), though this had significantly decreased since 2022 (79%). There was another significant decrease since 2022 in the proportion of businesses that had used Local Authorities for advice regarding the appropriate use of standards (29% 2024 vs 45% 2022).

Figure 8.1 Reasons for interacting with Local Authority in relation to product safety



B7. For what reasons has your business interacted with Local Authorities in relation to product safety? Base: All who had interacted with Local Authorities regarding product safety issues: 2024 (79); 2022 (79). The sum of the responses adds to more than 100% because respondents were able to give multiple responses.

Qualitative interviews revealed that interaction with Local Authorities was low among retailers and manufacturers and those that had interacted with Local Authorities had often not done so for product safety reasons. One retailer mentioned that the only interaction they had had with Local Authorities was when something went wrong rather than working with them collaboratively to ensure product safety. Many of the businesses interviewed felt the Local Authorities played a purely reactive role.

> *"The only impact of the Local Authority is when something goes wrong…. The Trading Standards Officer will come to make sure you're doing things right."* – **Retailer, Medium**

8.3 Awareness of Primary Authority Partnerships

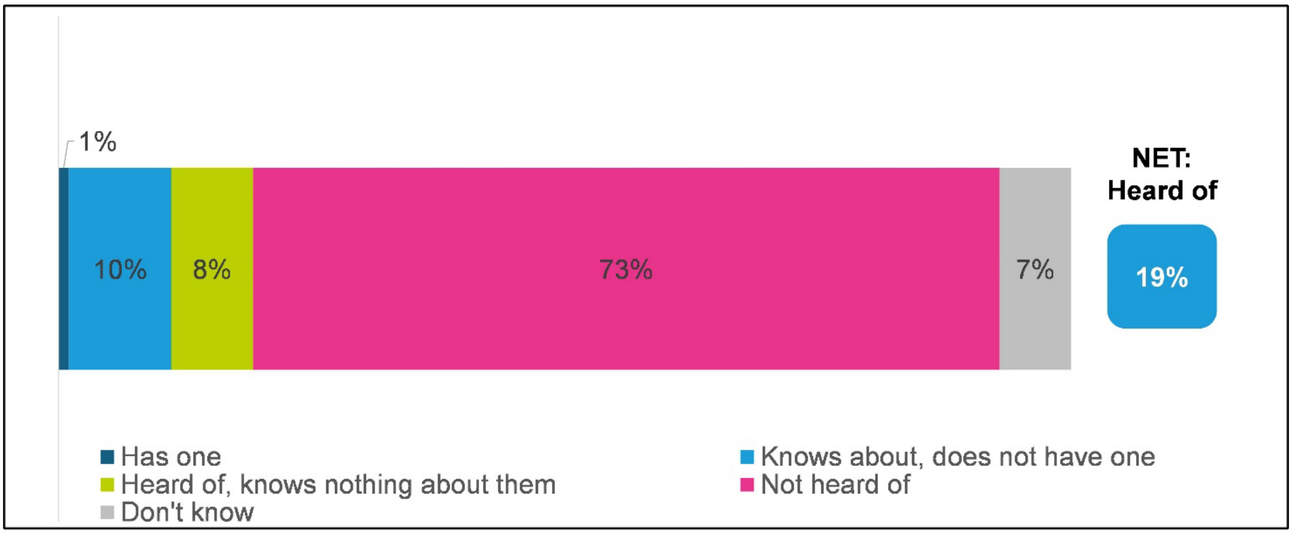
Primary Authority Partnerships are formal agreements between businesses and specific Local Authorities in the UK, designed to provide consistent and reliable regulatory advice and support. Under this partnership, Local Authorities act as business's primary point of contact for regulatory matters, including product safety.

It is worth noting that in Northern Ireland, a primary authority can provide services in relation to reserved matters that it has responsibility for – primarily in relation to product safety. Policy areas transferred to the Northern Ireland Executive are not in scope of Primary Authority.

There has been limited change since 2022 in the number of businesses that had a Primary Authority Partnership with a Local Authority (1% in both 2024 and 2022)[30]. As shown below in Figure 8.2, just under three quarters of businesses (73%) had never heard of Primary Authority Partnerships, 8% had heard of them but knew nothing about them, and a further 10% knew about them but did not have one.

With the exception of the Local Authorities themselves, no organisations interviewed qualitatively had a Primary Authority Partnership.

Figure 8.2 Awareness of Primary authority partnerships



B8. Which of the following best describes your awareness of Primary Authority Partnerships in relation to product safety? Base: All businesses (999)

shows a breakdown of awareness of Primary Authority Partnerships by business function. As can be seen importers were the least likely to not have heard of Primary Authority Partnerships (58% vs. 73% of all businesses) but they were also the most likely to report that they do not know about Primary Authority Partnerships (20% vs. 7% of all businesses).

[30] Although both appear as 1% this is due to rounding which is why the phrase ‘limited change’ has been used.

Table 8.1 Awareness of Primary Authority Partnerships by primary business[31]

Primary business function	Retailer	Manu-facturer	Installer	Fulfil-ment service provider	Repairer	Importer	Total
Has one	2%	1%	1%	0%	1%	2%	1%
Knows about, but does not have one	10%	10%	1%*	9%	8%	13%	10%
Heard of, knows nothing about them	8%	7%	12%	7%	15%	7%	8%
Not heard of	73%	73%	85%	77%	69%	58%*	73%
Don't know	7%	9%	1%	7%	7%	20%*	7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Percentages shown in figures are rounded to the nearest whole number, therefore the sum of individual percentages shown in figures does not always match the net total.

Table 8.2 shows the breakdown in awareness of Primary Authority Partnerships by business size and shows that medium businesses were more likely to have one than smaller businesses (8% of medium businesses compared with 1% of both sole traders and micro businesses).

[31] Figures with a * next to them are statistically significant from the overall average

Table 8.2 awareness of Primary Authority Partnerships by business size[32]

Business size	Sole (0)	Micro (1-9)	Small (10-49)	Medium (50-249)	Large (250+)	Total
Has one	1%	1%	1%	8%*	13%	1%
Knows about, but does not have one	8%	12%	9%	15%	19%	10%
Heard of, knows nothing about them	8%	9%	9%	21%*	11%	8%
Not heard of	75%	72%	74%	41%*	53%	73%
Don’t know	8%	6%	6%	15%*	5%	7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Percentages shown in figures are rounded to the nearest whole number, therefore the sum of individual percentages shown in figures does not always match the net total.

8.4 Chapter 8 conclusion

In this chapter, we have shown the role Local Authorities play in ensuring product safety through providing advice, conducting audits, and enforcing compliance, including overseeing product recalls. However, it has also shown that interactions between businesses and Local Authorities remain limited, with fewer than one in ten businesses reporting engagement, and many perceiving their role as primarily reactive rather than collaborative. Awareness of Primary Authority Partnerships is also low, with most businesses unaware of this resource, particularly smaller firms.

[32] Figures with a * next to them are statistically significant from the overall average

Summary of the role of Local Authorities

- As per previous waves, businesses interaction with Local Authorities is low and businesses often interact with Local Authorities about product safety in a reactive way, and not to seek advice or guidance. This highlights scope to foster more proactive relationships between businesses and Local Authorities, especially for smaller businesses. Further research may help determine ways of supporting such relationships between businesses and their Local Authorities, facilitating the development of business expertise in areas such as product recalls.
- The majority of businesses were unaware of Primary Authority Partnerships, with most having never heard of them at all.

9. Prevalence of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

This chapter reports on findings from a new set of questions, introduced in 2024, on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning among businesses. In section 9.1, we show that prevalence of AI as part of day-to-day practices among businesses is low and, in section 9.2, we show that prevalence of AI or machine learning within products is even lower. In section 9.3, we show that while there was not much of an appetite for the imminent adoption of AI, some businesses recognised its potential to improve accountability and safety through enhanced tracking and maintenance.

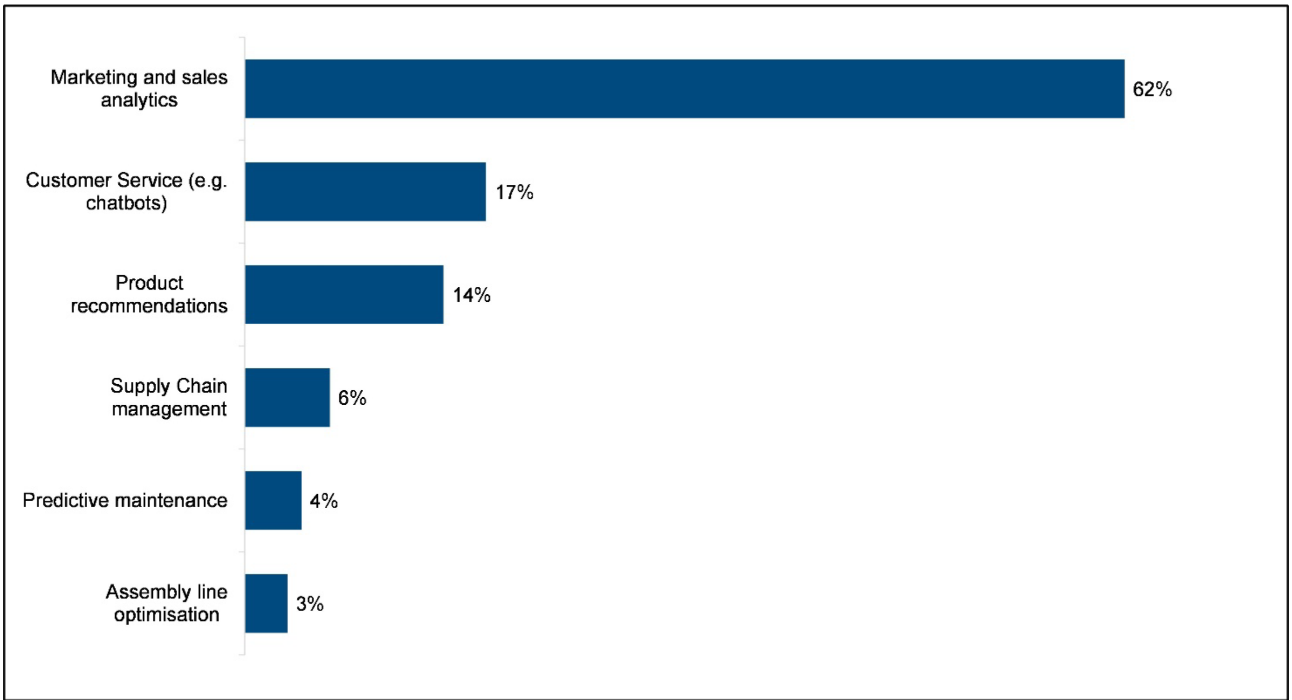
9.1 Prevalence of AI

A new set of questions in 2024 focused on the use and understanding of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning technologies. Businesses were asked whether they use or previously used AI. The majority (94%) had not used or were not using AI, while one in twenty (5%) were currently using AI. The remaining 1% had previously used AI but were no longer doing so.

Some business functions were more likely to use AI currently including installers (13%), manufacturers (13%) and fulfilment service providers (10%). Similarly, by size, businesses with more than 50 employees (21%) were more likely to be using AI.

As shown in Figure 9.1 businesses that used AI mainly did so for marketing and sales analytics (62%). A smaller proportion used AI for customer service (17%) and product recommendations (14%).

Figure 9.1 Ways in which businesses were using AI



G2. In which areas of your business has AI been utilised. Base: All businesses who have used AI (92). The sum of the responses adds to more than 100% because respondents were able to give multiple responses.

9.2 Use of AI in products sold or distributed

Only 1% of businesses used sold or distributed products with inbuilt AI or machine learning, which equates to an unweighted total of 25 businesses. The following section, on use of AI within products, is reported using the total number of businesses that responded rather than using percentages, due to this low number. As a result, the responses presented are not representative of the population and instead give some insight into the opinions of the specific businesses that answered.

Of the 25 businesses that sold or distributed products using AI, 10 believed that AI or machine learning posed no risk to product safety and therefore did not take any measures to mitigate the risk. Another 4 said that the responsibility to ensure safety fell on the supplier or manufacturer. The remaining businesses took at least some action to mitigate the risks of AI. These included:

- Rigorous testing and validation of AI systems before deployment (4);
- Feedback from customers (1);
- Adoption of industry standards and best practices for AI safety (1).

Other businesses spontaneously mentioned mitigations including secure hardware, basic security, or common sense.

9.3 Future use of AI

Organisations interviewed qualitatively who did not use AI were asked whether they were interested in using it in their business in the next 5 years. Many felt they had no requirement for AI, particularly smaller businesses. However, there was a common sentiment that the use of AI was increasing, and some businesses were interested in using it.

"I don't know how it's relevant to be honest, all of this stuff. If it offered something worthwhile then I'm not a Luddite, I'm perfectly happy to embrace technology as and when it becomes relevant but at the moment, I can't see the relevance." – **Retailer, Sole trader**

"It is not something that really concerns me in my small-scale business..." – **Retailer and Distributer, Micro**

"Things are automatically going to go that way [incorporating AI], whether you thought it was a great idea or not." – **Installer, Micro**

A few businesses mentioned that increased use of AI had potential to improve product safety, for example: by tracking products to reduce fraud and improve product safety.

"A key benefit is accountability—AI could track products from manufacturing to end use, reducing fraud and improving safety. While some jobs may be impacted, AI's role is likely to enhance efficiency and reliability across various sectors." – **Installer, Micro**

Legal advisers regarded AI as positive, seeing an opportunity to improve product safety. For example, one legal adviser said the use of AI could improve maintenance schedules.

However, they did stress the importance of businesses fully understanding their use of AI and doing checks to mitigate risks.

Additionally, they stressed the need to continue developing a legal framework in line with AI developments.

"So, the legal framework and legislation keep track with what is a very fast-moving area." – **Legal adviser**

"They're [regulations and guidance around AI] not clear insofar as it's not clear as to what legislation applies." – **Legal adviser**

Businesses did not report any unforeseen challenges experienced through the use of AI. However, Trading Standards did voice concerns about their lack of training on how AI can be used in product safety. They felt that they may struggle to advise and regulate businesses on their use of AI.

"I think a lot of us are too busy trying to hold closed the floodgates and do that. We haven't got the time to look into that effectively. To know what is out there and what to look for." – **Local Authority**

"I know it's going to be a big issue AI, but at the moment I just haven't got the experience to be able to comment [on how widely AI was being used]." – **Local Authority**

One Trade Association had seen an increase in AI but was not concerned as there were clear guidelines in terms of what can and can't be done. Their fundamental concern remains with product safety outcomes rather than tools.

"I think we should be regulating safety not regulating AI." – **Trade Association**

Organisations generally had a lack of understanding of scale, or any first-hand experience with AI in product safety. As a result, many felt that it was too early to really understand the impacts that AI might have on product safety. However, one legal adviser and one Trade Association said they had seen an increase in the use of AI. Organisations did speculate on the impacts AI could have shaping industries throughout the supply chain. For example, one legal adviser expressed concern about the use of AI in the design or construction of products, and how this could be controlled.

9.4 Chapter 9 conclusion

This chapter has shown that use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning among businesses was low, both as part of business practice and within products that are sold or distributed. While some businesses and legal advisers saw potential for AI to enhance efficiency, accountability, and product safety – particularly through improved tracking and maintenance – there is a widespread lack of understanding and experience. Most businesses did not perceive significant risks associated with AI, but those that do emphasised the need for rigorous testing and clear industry standards. OPSS may wish to continue monitoring the presence, application and impact of AI products within the UK, particularly as this applies to product safety. This may allow firmer conclusions to be drawn, informing measures OPSS takes to support businesses around AI as it relates to product safety.

Summary of prevalence of AI

- Majority of businesses had not or were not currently utilising AI within their business. Of those who were using AI, most were not using it in relation to product safety, but some larger businesses expressed their interest in adopting AI in the future.
- There was a limited understanding among both businesses and Local Authorities of AI. However, some viewed the adoption of AI to be an advancement that could be positively used to enforce product safety compliance.

10. Key challenges

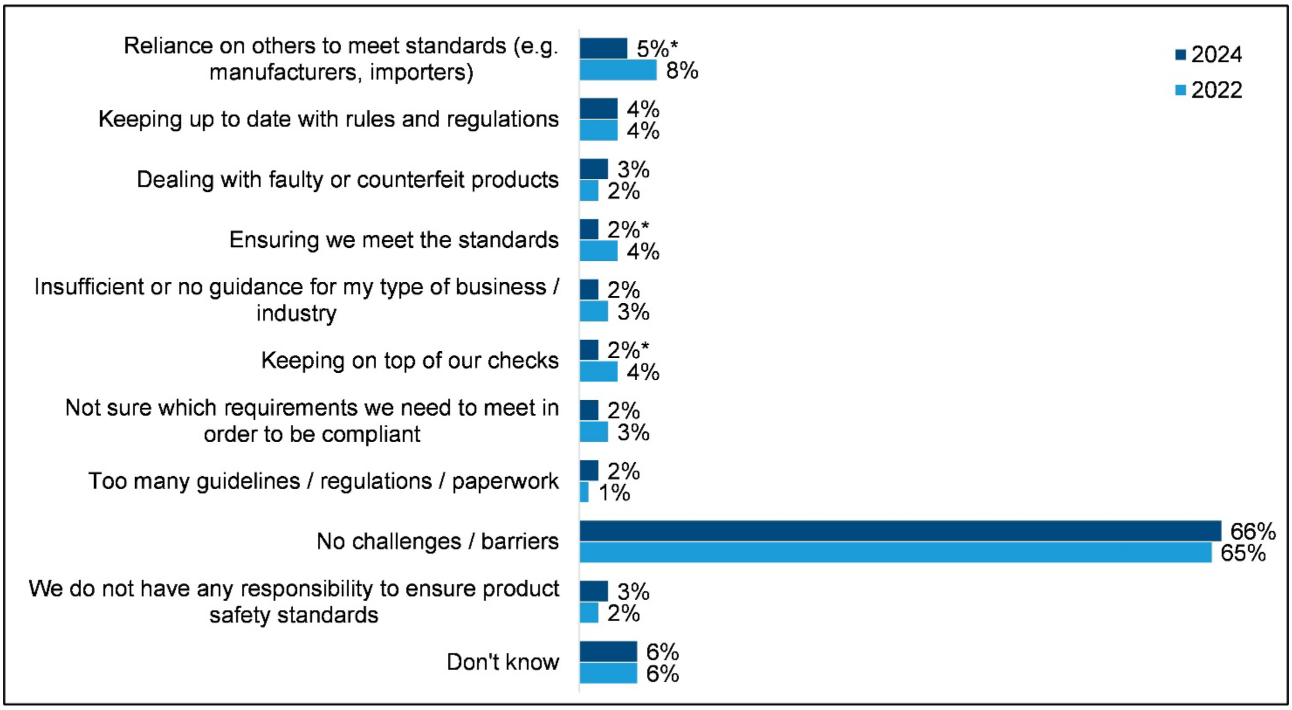
In this chapter, we present the challenges businesses faced in ensuring product safety compliance, drawing on both survey data and qualitative interviews. In section 10.1, we show that most businesses reported facing no significant challenges and, in section 10.2, we show that there were slightly more concerns from businesses about the challenges their industry faced regarding product safety compliance. In section 10.3, we discuss how there are concerns about online marketplaces and their possible impact on product safety within the supply chain. Finally, in section 10.4, we show how businesses have adapted to recent price inflation, highlighting how cost pressures have led some businesses to adapt their processes.

10.1 Challenges businesses face regarding product safety compliance

Businesses were asked in the survey about the challenges they faced regarding product safety compliance. As shown in Figure 10.1, two thirds (66%) of businesses said that they faced no challenges or barriers in ensuring product safety compliance, in line with findings from 2022 (65%).

The top challenge mentioned by businesses was reliance on others to meet safety standards (e.g. manufacturers, importers), which was mentioned by 5%, significantly less than the 8% of businesses that said this in 2022. The next most frequent challenges were keeping up to date with rules and regulations (4%) and dealing with faulty or counterfeit products (3%). Other challenges included ensuring they meet the standards, insufficient guidance for their industry, keeping on top of checks, lack of clarity about which requirements to meet, and too many guidelines/regulations, each of which was mentioned by 2% of businesses.

Figure 10.1. Challenges facing businesses regarding product safety compliance



E4. What challenges does your business face regarding product safety compliance? Base: All businesses: 2024 (999); 2022 (1,000). Responses under 2% in 2024 not shown. *Indicates significant difference between 2024 and 2022.

There were some differences by business function in the challenges they faced. Installers (35%) and manufacturers (30%) were most likely to say they faced any challenges regarding product safety compliance, compared to only 17% of retailers.

There was little variation by sector around the types of challenges faced, suggesting that specific challenges were more of a result of business function than sector overall. Although, it should be noted businesses in the electronics sector were most likely to report facing challenges (34% compared to 19% average).

Some businesses functions were significantly more likely to report challenges regarding product safety compliance than others. For installers this was:

- Dealing with faulty or counterfeit products (11%);
- Keeping up to date with rules and regulations (11%).

For manufacturers this was:

- Keeping up to date with rules and regulations (8%);
- Too many guidelines / regulations (5%).

Both installers and manufacturers highlighted challenges in keeping up to date with rules and regulations, suggesting a potential avenue for future research into understanding business needs in these areas.

In the qualitative research, most businesses did not face challenges regarding product safety and did not foresee many challenges in the future. It was felt that either the correct processes were in place to ensure safety, or that their products did not pose safety risks.

"I don't know that there are any [challenges] specifically, I think the only time that things are likely to change is if new processes are introduced." – **Clothing, sole trader**

Among businesses that did mention challenges, some raised the potential for product safety issues further up the product chain, for example in faulty or sub-standard products or components. One manufacturer mentioned that a shortage of products or component parts could lead to challenges regarding product safety.

"Like the situation during and after Covid … A lot of products were unavailable and that's where you do have to start looking elsewhere … places you wouldn't normally … This increases the risk." – ***Manufacturer, Small***

Some small businesses felt that product safety standards were less relevant to them because of their size and suggested there were more likely to be safety gaps in larger companies.

Other manufacturers interviewed qualitatively reported that they have very strict guidelines and safety checks in place to ensure that they do not buy counterfeit or faulty components and only tend to buy known or branded products.

10.2 Challenges industries face regarding product safety compliance

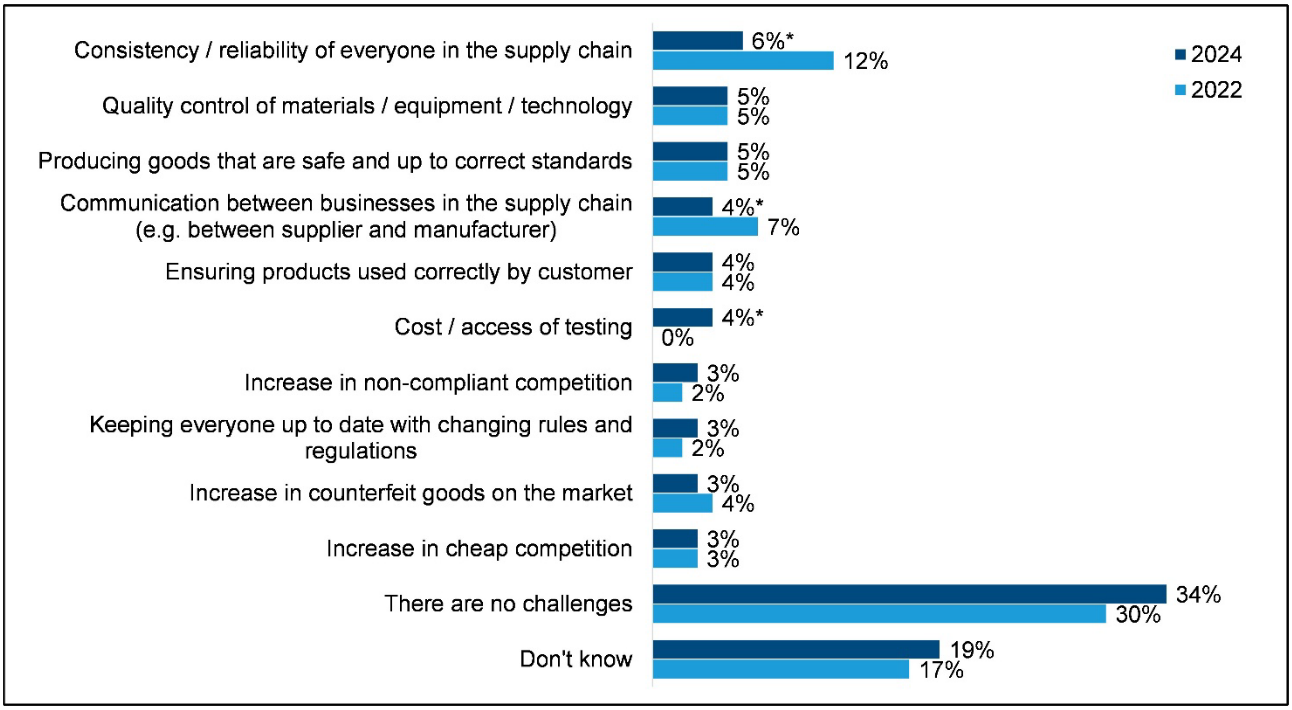
Businesses were also asked the biggest challenges to ensuring product safety within their industry. As in 2022, businesses were more likely to feel that there were product safety challenges within their industry than feel their own business faced challenges. Around a third of businesses (34%) said their industry faced no challenges, similar to the proportion saying this in 2022 (30%).

As shown in Figure 10.2, the most common challenge faced was the consistency or reliability of everyone in the supply chain (6%). This was also the top challenge in the 2022 survey but was mentioned by significantly more businesses (12%).

The challenges of quality control of materials, equipment or technology, and producing goods that are safe and up to correct standards were mentioned by one-in-twenty businesses (5%). Other challenges mentioned by 4% of businesses included:

- Communication between businesses in the supply chain;
- Ensuring products are used correctly by customers;
- The cost of, and access to, testing.

Figure 10.2 Challenges facing industry regarding product safety compliance



F1. What do you think are the biggest challenges to ensuring product safety within your industry? Base: All businesses: 2024 (999); 2022 (1,000). Responses under 3% in 2024 not shown. *Indicates significant difference between 2024 and 2022.

As shown in Figure 10.2, there was no dominant challenge that was mentioned. Instead, a wide range of challenges were reported, each affecting a relatively small proportion with fewer than 6% of businesses reporting each challenge. However, analysing by business function, there were clear differences in the challenges experienced.

Manufacturers were more likely to say their industry faced at least one challenge (54%, compared to 46% across all businesses), while retailers were the least likely to say their industry faced challenges (43%). More specifically, there was some variation in the challenges faced by different business functions:

- Importers were most likely to mention an increase in non-compliant competition (22% vs. 3% of all businesses) and consistency / reliability of everyone in the supply chain (18% vs. 6% of all businesses)[33];
- Installers were most likely to mention that producing goods that were safe and up to correct standards (21% vs. 5% of all businesses) and the quality control of materials / equipment / technology (13% vs. 5% of all businesses);
- Repairers were most likely to mention the communication between businesses in the supply chain, e.g. between supplier and manufacturer (14% vs. 4% of all businesses)[34]; and
- Fulfilment service providers were most likely to mention ensuring products were used correctly by customers (7% vs. 4% of all businesses).

[33] This finding should be treated with caution, due to the small number of businesses surveyed that were importers (30)
[34] This finding should be treated with caution, due to the small number of businesses surveyed that were repairers (47)

By sector, businesses in electronics (65%) were most likely to say their business faced at least one challenge. Businesses in the electronics sector were also more likely than businesses in other sectors to say their industry faced the following challenges:

- An increase in non-compliant competition (19% vs. 3% overall);
- An increase in counterfeit goods on the market (10% vs. 3%);
- Producing products that are safe and up to the correct standards (9% vs 5%);
- An increase in cheap competition (6% vs 3%);
- Uncertainty around product safety regulations following the UK's exit from the EU (6% vs 2%);"
- Lack of clarity around current standards (5% vs 2%).

Businesses in the clothing sector were more likely than average to report challenges in their industry around:

- The cost of or access to testing (7% vs. 4% of all businesses);
- An increase in cheap competition (6% vs. 3% for all businesses).

Several of the organisations interviewed qualitatively also reported challenges facing their sector regarding product safety compliance. One legal adviser involved in the electrical sector believed that significant risks are posed by counterfeit non-compliant products and components.

In their view, counterfeit products can make it into the supply chain for electrical goods, and it is not always straightforward to pick up with due diligence and testing. The adviser also stated it can be difficult to identify whether something is counterfeit through a visual inspection, and there is often counterfeit documentation accompanying the counterfeit product.

"My perception is that it's a relatively small proportion of products that go on the market [with counterfeit components] but can have significant impact in terms of product safety and quality." – **Legal adviser**

A retailer involved in manufacturing expressed concerns that smaller companies, especially installers, may have lesser knowledge than their larger counterparts which could affect product safety compliance in the sector.

Other small businesses in the clothing sector felt confident that larger organisations in their sector (manufacturers, wholesalers) would have the structure, processes and personnel in place to ensure that high standards are upheld.

"I think the big players have got the resource required and necessary to ensure that what is going on is safe. … I am small, and I don't have that structure, but the big players do." – **Retailer, Micro**

10.3 Challenges around online marketplaces

As in 2022, there was some concern among organisations interviewed qualitatively about product safety compliance for products sold through online marketplaces. Some felt it was easy for overseas businesses to sell products via online marketplaces without product safety checks being completed.

"I dare say there's some knock off [products on online marketplaces] … and not too many tests being completed." – **Manufacturer, Micro**

Some organisations felt that online marketplaces made national monitoring and enforcement of product safety standards much more difficult as it is quite easy to set up and sell non-compliant products.

"I anticipate there is still a high degree of non-compliance among online sellers." – **Legal adviser**

One manufacturer also reported seeing component parts for their own products available on online marketplaces, although they said they would only buy from reputable suppliers.

"The other day I needed a part for a machine, and I am looking up this part and there it is on [online marketplaces]. They just pop up like a random product that looks very similar. Someone who doesn't know what they're looking at could have quite easily bought that." – **Manufacturer, Sole trader**

Some repairers and installers did report using online marketplaces to buy products but claimed to only look for reputable sellers. Some did express concern about the quality of some products bought online by their customers.

"Things are being supplied that shouldn't be used." – **Installer, Micro**

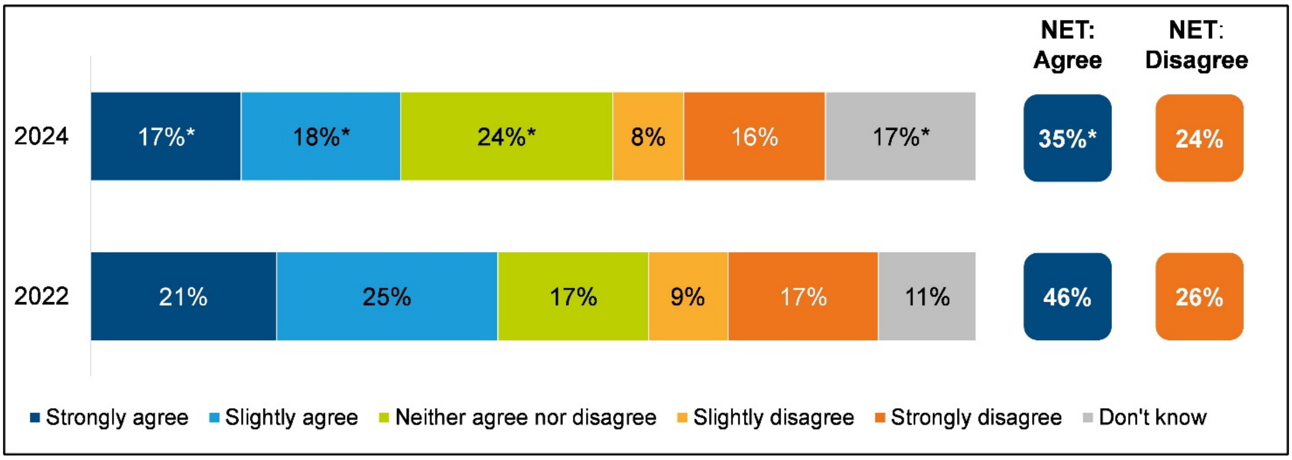
A Trade Association also discussed the growth of online marketplaces and reported that they had impacted product safety. Spare parts sold on online marketplaces were a big concern.

"There can be difficulty with recourse on [online marketplaces]. They [customers] can just get a replacement but not necessarily any investigation into product safety. … And are consumers getting a product from where they think?" – **Trade Association**

In the survey, businesses were asked the extent to which they agreed that there is effective regulation in place to ensure that products sold by third parties through online marketplaces to UK customers were safe. Overall, just over a third of businesses (35%) agreed that effective regulation is in place while around a quarter disagreed (24%), as shown in Figure 10.3.

Agreement that effective regulation was in place for online marketplaces had significantly declined since the 2022 survey, when almost half (46%) agreed with the statement. However, the proportion disagreeing with the statement has remained broadly consistent (24% in 2024 and 26% in 2022), while businesses in the 2024 survey were more likely to say they 'neither agree nor disagree' (24% vs 17% in 2022), or that they 'don't know' (17% vs 11% in 2022).

Figure 10.3. Agreement that there is effective regulation in place to ensure products sold by third parties through online marketplaces to UK customers are safe



F3. To what extent do agree with the statement 'There is effective regulation in place to ensure that products sold by third parties through online marketplaces to UK customers are safe'? Base: All businesses: 2024 (999); 2022 (1,000).

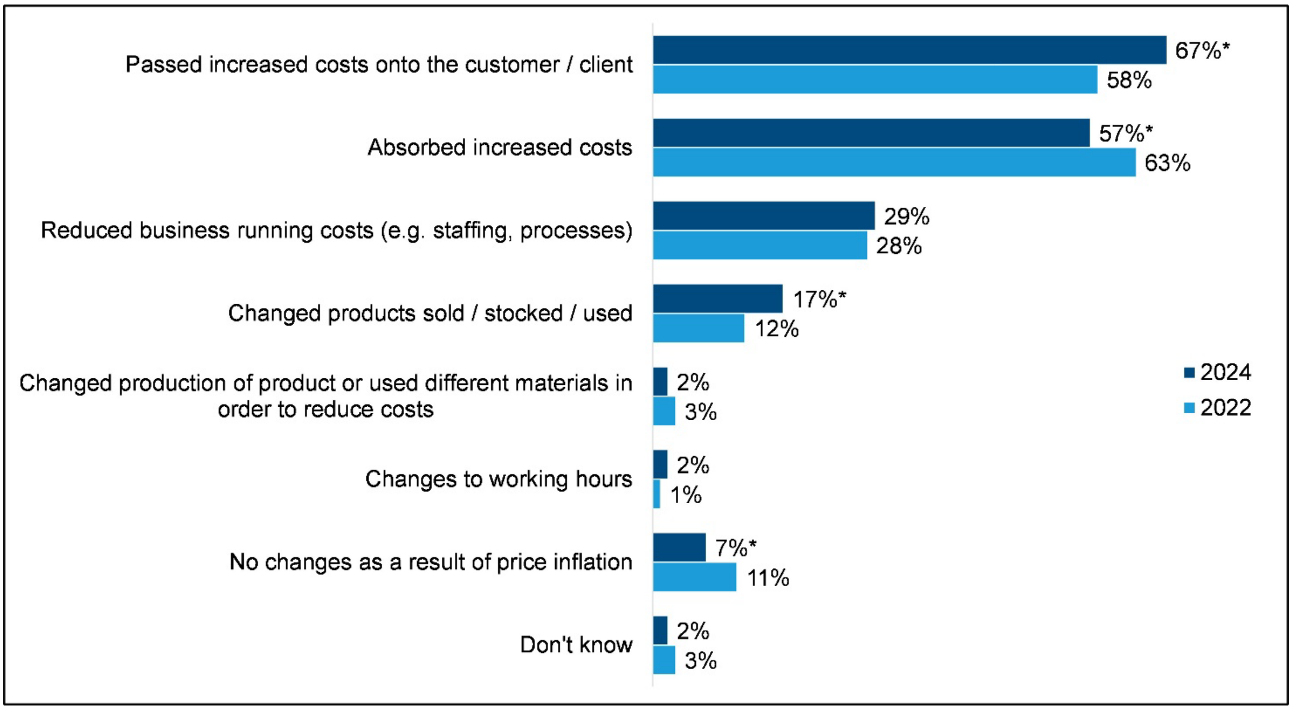
There was little variation by business function, although installers and importers were more likely to disagree that there is effective regulation in place (52% and 38% disagreed respectively, vs 24% of all businesses). Large and medium sized businesses were more likely to agree that there was effective regulation in place to ensure that products sold by third parties through online marketplaces to UK customers are safe (55% agreed, vs 35% overall).

10.4 Businesses' reactions to recent price inflation

Businesses were asked how, if at all, they had changed their processes as a result of the recent price inflation. As shown in Figure 10.4, two-thirds (67%) said they had passed some increased costs onto their customers or clients, while more than half (57%) had absorbed some of the increased costs. Around three-in-ten (29%) had reduced their business's running costs, and one-in-eight (17%) had changed the products they sold or used. A small proportion (2%) had changed the production of their products or used different materials in order to reduce costs and had made changes to working hours. Just 7% said they had made no changes as a result of price inflation.

Compared to 2022, businesses were significantly more likely to say they had passed on their increased costs to their customers (67% vs 58% in 2022) and less likely to have absorbed the increased costs (57% vs. 63% in 2022). Businesses were also significantly more likely to have changed their products (17% vs. 12% in 2022). They were significantly less likely to report no changes as a result of price inflation in 2024 (7% vs. 11% in 2022). These findings are likely reflective of the sustained price inflation that has occurred in the two years since 2022, as businesses became unable to absorb costs over a lengthy period of time.

Figure 10.4. How businesses have changed processes as a result of price inflation



F4. How, if at all, has your business changed its processes as a result of recent price inflation? Base: All businesses: 2024 (999); 2022 (1,000). Responses under 2% in 2024 not shown. *Indicates significant difference between 2024 and 2022. The sum of the responses adds to more than 100% because respondents were able to give multiple responses.

By business function, repairers were more likely to report having absorbed the increased costs (81% vs. 57% of all businesses). Retailers were the most likely to have reduced business running costs (32% vs. 29% overall). Both repairers and retailers were more likely than other businesses to have changed the products they sold or used (36% and 25%, compared to 17% overall). Manufacturers were more likely than average to have changed the production of their product or used different materials in order to reduce costs (11% vs. 2% overall). Fulfilment service providers were mostly likely to report having made no changes as a result of recent price inflation (13% vs. 7% of all businesses).

By size of business, large and medium sized businesses were more likely to say they had reduced their business's running costs (46% of those with more than 50 employees, compared to 29% overall).

The responses from organisations interviewed qualitatively focused mainly on the risk that some other businesses may choose to change their suppliers because of price increases, looking to buy cheaper and in bulk quantities from countries where product safety regimes are less strict than in the UK.

> *"There could be a risk associated where there is bulk purchase and it's not from the UK, because if you wanted to go [abroad], or wherever to buy, they're only interested in volume."* – **Retailer, Sole trader**

Several businesses mentioned that they have not personally changed suppliers to save costs in their own business but felt this might be a risk elsewhere.

"I suppose people are lowering their grade of materials to save money and costs, but I wouldn't personally lower the cost or the grades." –
Manufacturer, Sole trader

As in 2022, there was a concern that organisations who were trying to save money may reduce product safety roles within their organisation. One respondent reported that their role was being made redundant and feared that this showed a dilution of the importance of safety and compliance.

Many businesses interviewed qualitatively reported that the economic situation and price increases were having no impact on product safety in their industry, or that they had seen no evidence of an impact.

10.5 Chapter 10 conclusion

This chapter has shown that the majority of businesses do not believe they face many challenges with product safety compliance. However, reliance on others in the supply chain and keeping up with regulations remain notable issues, particularly for manufacturers and installers. While most businesses were confident in their own compliance, concerns were raised around industry-wide consistency, counterfeit and non-compliant goods, and the effectiveness of regulation in online marketplaces, with many calling for improved monitoring and clearer standards. These insights could inform future OPSS research into product safety, particularly with regard to online marketplaces.

The impact of recent price inflation has led many businesses to pass costs onto customers or adapt their processes. This included almost one in five (17%) changing the products they sold and 2% updating the materials they used raising potential risks where cost-cutting could compromise product safety. To help mitigate these risks, OPSS continues to monitor market conditions and supports businesses in maintaining safety and compliance during economic fluctuations.

Summary of key challenges

- Most businesses did not feel they experience any challenges regarding product safety compliance. However, of those who did, supply chain reliability and keeping up to date with rules and regulations continue to be the key challenges experienced.
- Most businesses felt that online marketplaces continue to pose a risk to product safety compliance and enforcement, with only just over a third agreeing that there is effective regulation in place to ensure products sold by third parties through online marketplaces to UK customers are safe.
- As a result of price inflation, most businesses reported passing on increased costs to the consumer or client. However, some businesses expressed concerns that price inflation could be leading to cost-cutting measures that put product safety at risk or push consumers to unsafe counterfeit goods due to their lower price.

11. Future Opportunities

In this chapter, we will discuss findings from the qualitative interviews on future opportunities which could improve the product safety system. Many of the organisations struggled to identify any specific opportunities; however, two key themes that did emerge were international markets; and consumer visibility and awareness.

11.1 International Markets

A theme that emerged from interviews was the differences between UK product safety and international regulation and requirements of product safety, particularly since the 31st of January 2020, when the UK officially left the EU.

Legal advisers in particular were concerned by the lack of consistency between European and UK standards of product safety. They described this as a block for global businesses to enter the UK market and could prevent growth and sales.

"The industry is crying out for consistency with Europe…" – **Legal adviser**

"The UK wanting to have its own framework in place I think creates potential issues for those manufacturers that operate on a global or pan-European basis, that is an extra headache they have to face." – **Legal adviser**

An opportunity for OPSS could be playing a stronger role in the international market and working to close the gap between the UK and European regulation and requirements through its influence. This was mentioned as a point OPSS could continue to develop as part of its evolution.

Having consistent tests and guidance in place across foreign markets would help businesses operating across these, whether that be distributing, retailing or purchasing components from abroad to use for manufacturing.

11.2 Visibility and awareness

Similarly to 2022, another theme that emerged from the interviews was the need for more work to be done to ensure that consumers were well educated and were wary or cautious on purchasing products valued below the market rate, as well as being able to identify when product safety regulations have been adhered to.

"With the potential price increases in the future. There may be some cheaper products coming on the market, and they may not be as safe." – **Retail, Small**

The growth of online markets was a cause for concern for some organisations, as also seen in 2022. The Local Authorities and Trade Associations that were interviewed felt that consumers may not be aware that goods purchased through online platforms may not be subject to the same safety standards as a UK retailer. They explained that by sourcing goods directly from countries abroad, consumers may be unaware of this and assuming UK standards.

"I suppose it's a bit naïve and a reliance on 'there must be someone doing it', but actually when you look into it, they're [consumers] importing themselves directly from [abroad]. So, it's up to them to check it's safe. And a lot of them aren't." – **Local Authority**

It was expressed in interviews that they felt online retailers should be taking responsibility for the safety of good sold through their online marketplace. This highlights an opportunity to empower consumers to think about how product safety affects them and what they can do themselves.

Additionally, there could be economic benefits from product safety visibility. Businesses mentioned that product safety shows consumers that their brand can be trusted, and represents high quality. Raising consumer awareness of product safety and the testing process the items they are buying have been through, could benefit businesses also.

"Building trust - offering a quality product, getting a name for doing product safety checks will be good for business and build trust with consumers." – **Retailer and Distributer, Sole trader**

Although organisations struggled to identify specific opportunities for future improvement in the product safety system, the themes of this year were around expansion and influence into international markets and raising consumer awareness of product safety. In previous years, themes have included OPSS playing a more supportive role for small businesses, working on education and guidance particularly for smaller and more niche businesses, as well as using technology for future optimisation and innovation.

11.3 Chapter 11 conclusion

In summary, qualitative interviews highlighted two main opportunities for strengthening the UK product safety system: greater alignment with international regulations and improved consumer visibility and awareness. Differences between UK and European product safety requirements were seen, by some, as a barrier to international trade, suggesting that OPSS could play a more active role in harmonising standards and guidance across markets to support global business growth. At the same time, businesses emphasised the need for increased consumer education, particularly in the context of online marketplaces, so that individuals understand their role in identifying safe products. Any efforts to close regulatory gaps with international partners and invest in campaigns and resources that raise public awareness of product safety, could benefit both consumers and businesses by building trust and supporting market access.

Summary of future opportunities

- Businesses expressed concerns over the differences between the UK and international markets regarding product safety standards, with some noting that aligning international and UK regulations and requirements could ease compliance.
- As seen in the last wave, some businesses felt that increasing consumer awareness of product safety including registrations and general awareness could improve product safety compliance and allow for unsafe, non-compliant or counterfeit goods to be identified faster, especially for those purchased through online marketplaces.

12. Conclusions

This section provides an overview of key findings from across the report in relation to the main research objects, including differences between Wave 2 in 2022 and the Wave 3 in 2024. Specifically, this section looks to summarise perceptions and attitudes towards product safety and the product safety system, how they have changed over time, and the extent to which these perceptions and attitudes are shared among system actors.

Perceptions that product safety in the UK was of a high standard remained from 2022 to 2024, with improved perceptions of consistency and reliability in other actors within the supply chain since 2022. Key motivators for maintaining product safety include reputation, accountability, and legal compliance, though priorities and levels of engagement vary by business size and sector. There is a growing trend towards industry ownership of product safety, with manufacturers and suppliers seen as holding primary responsibility, while awareness and engagement with regulatory bodies such as OPSS and Local Authorities remains low, particularly among smaller businesses. Businesses reported feeling less confident in effective regulation than the previous wave.

Most businesses continue to rely on suppliers and manufacturers for product safety information, but usage of these sources and engagement with formal safety practices has declined. Smaller businesses and sole traders are less likely to seek out information or participate in audits, product registration, or recalls. OPSS was better understood by medium sized businesses than smaller ones. Micro businesses and sole traders also did not have a clear understanding of OPSS' role compared to their larger counterparts. Trading Associations and Local Authorities demonstrated a clear, detailed understanding and awareness of OPSS.

The vast majority of businesses considered that resources available to them provide sufficient guidance, in line with previous waves of this research. Most found these resources valuable and stated nothing was missing, though a minority fed back that resources were hard to understand or that they had searched for certain information they were unable to find. There were some perceived differences between EU and UK regulation and mixed perceptions of public bodies such as British Standards Institution (BSI) and the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS), with varying levels of awareness and understanding of their role.

While high standards of product safety are generally maintained, there are gaps in awareness and clarity around shared responsibilities, especially in relation to emerging technologies and online marketplaces. The vast majority of businesses do not use AI, save for a minority who use it for sales or marketing purposes. Many had no interest in implementing AI and generally presented a lack of understanding of it. Most did not see any risks associated with AI, though for those who did, the main concerns were that legislation stays ahead of its development. Legal advisers had positive views of AI.

Local Authorities and Trade Associations highlighted concerns about online marketplaces and the additional risk to consumers when purchasing from abroad, highlighting that they were not confident that consumers were aware of this risk.

Contact us if you have any enquiries about this publication, including requests for alternative formats, at: OPSS.enquiries@businessandtrade.gov.uk

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