



**TSI Press Office**

**Telephone: 0845 608 9430**

**Fax: 0845 608 9431**

**Outside office hours: 07961 488408**

[pressoffice@tsi.org.uk](mailto:pressoffice@tsi.org.uk)

[www.tradingstandards.gov.uk](http://www.tradingstandards.gov.uk)

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**Calls for Government to act over potentially lethal electrical products**

Trading Standards professionals in Buckinghamshire have joined a campaign by the Trading Standards Institute (TSI) to strengthen the law to protect consumers from potentially lethal electrical products.

TSI has made repeated calls for the Government to take action over dangerous electrical goods over the past few years. TSI raised the issue again last November following the death of a young boy who was killed while using a faulty games console charger.

Seven-year-old Connor O'Keeffe died while on a family holiday to Thailand in December 2006. He was electrocuted while playing with his Gameboy, using a counterfeit, unsafe charger bought on the holiday island.

TSI has repeatedly called for the Government to make changes to the law, with the latest calls being made in June when Connor's mother Patsy was presented with a TSI Hero Award.

But TSI's product safety expert says no action has been taken by the Government to combat the problem of unsafe electrical goods.

TSI urges the Government to:

- Promote a national sampling and testing programme for products, backed by adequate funding, and collate the details on a central database.
- Review the use of the CE mark – commonly interpreted as a declaration that a product meets strict European safety standards but which, in the case of toys and electrical equipment, is in fact a self declaration of safety by the manufacturers. Other consumer products, including gas appliances and personal protection equipment, can only legally carry the CE mark after being tested and/or accredited by an independent organisation.
- Re-introduce a government-funded central database listing details of incidents and injuries in the home and outside to highlight trends and areas of concern more quickly and effectively. These databases were maintained centrally until 2001-02.
- Work closely with internet auction sites to make sure they are aware of their responsibilities on safety.

Ron Gainsford, chief executive of TSI, said: "Not enough is being done by the Government to protect consumers from purchasing dangerous products.

“We have repeatedly asked for changes to be made to the law and for new procedures to be put in place but nothing has materialised. It is vitally important the Government starts listening to our suggestions in order to prevent consumers being injured or killed by faulty electrical products.

“We are delighted that Buckinghamshire trading standards has joined the campaign to raise public awareness of the issue and also lobby the Government for better regulation of the supply of electrical equipment into the UK.”

Buckinghamshire trading standards has joined with TSI in calling for the Government to improve the regulation of the supply of electrical equipment into the UK after it investigated a case where a replacement charger for a games console exploded in a child’s hand.

Buckinghamshire launched its ‘What’s in your socket’ campaign after it received a complaint following the incident, in which the child narrowly escaped electrocution after the charger, bought for 99p off the internet, blew up.

As a result of the complaint, a sample of 40 chargers, obtained from a range of outlets, was sent for testing by Buckinghamshire. Only the 12 branded chargers tested were found to comply with UK electrical safety regulations.

The tests revealed that, due to poor internal construction, there was a risk that soldered wires in the unsafe chargers could become disconnected, leading to the possibility of the user receiving an electric shock. The pin size of the chargers was also below the required standard and could cause the product to overheat.

The chargers are being sold widely for charging mobile phones, gaming machines, cameras and portable music players and are being imported from China.

Gina Green, Buckinghamshire trading standards team leader, said: “The issue of the safety of electrical products has mushroomed beyond belief since last year.

“We have found that there are approximately 1.9 million UK online sales of replacement chargers a year. All of the unbranded chargers that we have had tested have failed in respect to potential electrocution and overheating. Other authorities are reporting similar findings.

“Whilst we have a framework of laws designed to protect consumers from potentially unsafe electrical goods, enforcement is localised and piecemeal with no central coordinating body.

“Furthermore, the introduction of independent tests on imported products, prior to them being offered for sale in the UK, would eradicate the danger outright.”

Buckinghamshire trading standards has produced a DVD to warn consumers about the potential dangers posed by using cheap electrical chargers produced in China that are flooding the UK market.

The Buckinghamshire service has also posted a petition calling on the Prime Minister to stop potentially lethal electrical products being imported into the UK. The petition is available at <http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/unsafe-chargers/>

Ron Gainsford added: “When buying electrical appliances that come from overseas, the main thing to check is that the plug is the correct type and voltage for the UK market and meets the requirements of UK plugs and sockets legislation.”

Phil Buckle, director of charitable affairs at the Electrical Safety Council, said: “Counterfeit and substandard electrical products risk lives and if no action is taken to combat the problem it’s only a

matter of time before we see further tragedies occur as more and more of these dangerous products find their way into UK homes.

“The Electrical Safety Council campaigns hard to raise awareness amongst consumers of the dangers of poor quality electrical goods, as well as working with responsible manufacturers and retailers to improve product safety standards, but Government needs to do more to tighten-up the regulations to prevent dangerous imports from making their way into the UK marketplace.

“The Electrical Safety Council fully supports the work that TSI and Buckingham trading standards is doing in helping to bring this issue to the fore. In the meantime, we urge consumers to be wary – if you are in any doubt as to the authenticity or safety of an electrical product, do not buy it, do not use it.”