

Products from online marketplaces continue to fail safety tests

Compilation of research on unsafe products from online marketplaces from 2021 and 2022.



Two years ago, six of BEUC's members bought and analysed a total of 250 products from online marketplaces. The test concluded that [two thirds of the products failed EU safety laws.](#)

Since then, our members' research has continued to prove that dangerous products from online marketplaces is still putting European consumers at risk in different ways. In this summary you will find the latest information on toys with small parts making them a choking hazard, cosmetics containing banned chemicals, smart products with privacy problems and more.

Even though marketplaces will remove dangerous products upon request this is too late as often consumer harm has already been done and research shows that the products reappear¹. It goes without saying that further action is needed to ensure that the European rules for consumer protection work as intended: The marketplaces need to be liable for products sold through their websites.

¹ BEUC members found an ineffective smoke detector on an online marketplace in 2020 and notified the marketplace. In late 2021 the same smoke detector was once again found on the online marketplace.

Teeth whiteners had more than 100 times the legal limit of hydrogen peroxide

In May 2021 UK consumer organisation Which? tested various teeth whiteners from AliExpress, Amazon, eBay and Wish.com. Out of the 36 products tested, 21 products contained illegal amounts of hydrogen peroxide.

The legal limit of hydrogen peroxide in teeth-whitening products sold over the counter is 0.1%. Six of the tested products contained more than 100 times the legal limit of hydrogen peroxide.

Hydrogen peroxide is limited in teeth whitening products because it can damage the teeth enamel in too high concentrations. The substance can also cause irritation to gums, oral mucosa and increase teeth sensitivity.

Although professional teeth whiteners used by dentists can contain more hydrogen peroxide, several of the teeth whiteners from online marketplaces had concentrations exceeding the limit for professional whiteners.

[Read more: Which? press release](#)

Cosmetics lacked required information and contained harmful chemicals

Scandinavian consumer organisations Forbrukerrådet, Sveriges Konsumenter and Forbrugerrådet Tænk looked at a total of 102 cosmetic products marketed towards children in November 2021. About a fourth (26) of the cosmetics were bought on online marketplaces.

All the 26 products received the lowest of the three possible ratings in the test. Twelve of the products did not list ingredients – which is legally required in the EU – leaving consumers and parents with no chance of knowing what kind of chemicals were in the cosmetics.

Other products contained perfume or chemicals suspected of being endocrine disrupters or causing allergies. Children are more sensitive to chemicals than adults, so contact with perfume and problematic chemicals should be limited.

[Read more: Article from Forbrugerrådet Tænk Kemi \(in Danish\)](#)

In another test of cosmetics conducted in July 2021,



Photo: Forbrugerrådet Tænk Kemi

Danish consumer organisation Forbrugerrådet Tænk found similar problems. Out of 40 products, 23 failed to display the list of ingredients. Among those which were transparent about the ingredients, three contained chemicals which are illegal in consumer products in the EU:

- An eyelash colour containing Toluene-2,5-diamine sulfate, which is only allowed in products for professional use.
- An eyebrow colour containing pyrogallol, which is banned in cosmetics.
- A lip gloss containing two parabens which have been banned in cosmetics in the EU since 2015 (isobutylparaben and isopropylparaben).

[Read more: Article from Forbrugerrådet Tænk Kemi](#)



Photo: Forbrugerrådet Tænk Kemi

Dangerously strong magnets and choking hazards in toys

In December 2021, Spanish consumer organisation OCU bought 20 toys on online marketplaces and found 9 of them to be dangerous for children.

Most risks are related to small parts that could cause choking if used by children under the age of three. The small parts were found in a variety of different toys, from dolls to wooden toys.

Another problematic finding was a unicorn doll containing phthalates, a substance which negatively impacts a child's hormonal system.

A magnetic game had magnets so strong that they could cause harm to the child if swallowed.

[Read more: OCU press release \(in Spanish\)](#)

Similar finds were made [in Denmark \(2022\)](#) and [UK \(2021\)](#).



Photo: OCU

Gun style thermometers were dangerously inaccurate

UK consumer organisation Which? bought eight infrared thermometers from online marketplaces in autumn 2021. Three of the products were "wildly inaccurate".

Seven of the eight thermometers investigated had no or incomplete CE marking, e.g. missing the code showing that it has been checked by a notified body – which is required for medical devices.

The three most inaccurate thermometers all measured too high temperatures, putting consumers at risk of thinking they are ill when they are not.

[Read more: Which? press release](#)



Photo: Consumentenbond

Air fryer started emitting smoke as soon as it was plugged in

An air fryer purchased on wish.com by Dutch organisation Consumentenbond in 2021 started emitting smoke as soon as it was first operated, making the organisation cancel any further investigations of the product.

"Smart" products with security and privacy problems

Just in time for Black Friday 2021, UK consumer organisation Which? warned consumers about "smart products" from online marketplaces. Products like doorbells, cameras, alarms, and tablets connected to the internet could come with apps with inadequate security protection.

Which? found 1.727 different products sold on online marketplaces and operated via just four apps. Working with experts, Which? found that the apps could make consumers vulnerable to hacking. Password security was a widespread problem.

[Read more: Which? press release](#)

Car seats for children had multiple safety problems

Dutch consumer organisation Consumentenbond ordered two children's car seats from outside the EU, which had different problems.

One was a kind of harness with a mat – not anywhere near an actual car seat. It did not provide easy access to quickly remove the child in case of emergency.

The other product was a “portable and foldable” child safety seat, again not resembling an actual car seat. A test of a similar product found that it was easy for children – especially small children – to get out of the product on their own. According to Consumentenbond, the same would be true for the portable seat bought from outside EU.

Both products did not provide the consumer with adequate information about the product.

[Read more: Article from Consumentenbond \(in Dutch\)](#)



Photo: Consumentenbond

Brakes on pushchair broke during test

Consumentenbond bought a pushchair on the online marketplace alibaba.com. The pushchair had numerous security issues: The foam was too soft, making it possible for the child to pull it apart and swallow pieces of it. The brakes also failed to keep the pushchair from moving on just a slight slope.

During an endurance test a screw on one of the wheels broke, making the whole cart collapse.

[Read more: Article from Consumentenbond \(in Dutch\)](#)

Fire escape was actually fire hazard

In a paper on consumers' problems with online marketplaces, German consumer organisation Verbraucherzentrale Bundesverband highlights safety issues with three examples:

A consumer had bought a fire escape ladder, that was made of regular nylon. Exposed to fire the nylon would not only melt but even keep burning. The company refused to refund the consumer, stating that the consumer put the ladder on fire.

FFP2-masks had the wrong CE-number, smelled extremely chemical and were not individually packaged, an issue the manufacturer expressly warned against.

A consumer bought a night light for their son. The light was easily pulled apart, leaving the electronics completely exposed. The child suffered an electric shock and had to go the hospital because of small burn blisters on his finger.

[Read more: Publication from vzbv \(In German\)](#)

The solution

To keep European consumers safe from unsafe products, BEUC recommends:

- [Improving the draft General Product Safety Regulation](#) by widening the definition of safety, clarifying the role of online marketplaces, improving traceability across the supply chain and placing all products under the same – upgraded – market surveillance rules.
- [Updating the Product Liability Directive](#) from 1985, that does not take online marketplaces into account. The marketplaces should be liable in certain cases, among others when the producer cannot be identified, or when the producer does not take action to remedy the harm.
- In the absence of a strengthened liability regime for online marketplaces, the [Digital Services Act](#) must as a minimum establish a [clear obligation on online marketplaces to verify traders and conduct periodical random checks](#) on the services and products they offer, just as [consumer organisations do](#). Online marketplaces should conduct mystery shopping exercises and request and verify all necessary information to ensure that only legitimate traders are allowed in their platforms, as well as providing for effective means of redress for consumers.
- Cooperating with regulators outside the EU. For instance, the EU and US could use the discussions in their [‘Trade and Tech Council’](#) to exchange data about non-compliant products, or to coordinate investigations.

Published in March 2022 by BEUC

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