

2nd Edition - Winter 2010



Product Service

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CONSUMER::Talk

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Dear Readers:

Welcome to the second edition of CONSUMER Talk, the consumer Newsletter from TÜV SÜD Product Service. After the great success of the first edition we hope to communicate important information and news, keeping you aware of changes in standards and the regulatory environment as well as our activities.

We trust you will enjoy this second issue. If you have any questions on any of the related topics please contact us, and we will be happy to help.
Jean-Louis Evans - Managing Director

Ten tips for making Christmas gift-giving a time of pleasure

As Christmas approaches, retailers have prepared for the rush to buy toys, wide-screen TVs, computer games, mobile phones or winter jackets. But just how safe are those gifts under the Christmas tree? TÜV SÜD Product Service provides consumers with ten tips on how to keep risks to a minimum when buying presents.

1. No hotline to Santa Claus? Then it's best to get your presents from specialist retailers, respectable online shops or reputable discounters, where you can return defective goods and also claim damages if the worst comes to the worst.

2. Even Father Christmas has a home address! Are the manufacturer's or importer's name and full address given on the present you have chosen? Beware if these details are missing, as is often the case with cheap – and possibly dangerous – products without identifiable origin.

3. Being thrifty may be nifty - but not at Christmas: ensure that the price of your present is in relation to its material value. Cut-price offers frequently compromise on safety and reliability.

4. A 'passport' but not a safety label: CE marking only reflects a manufacturer's declaration that its products comply with the minimum requirements of the relevant European directives. Neither product nor production facilities, however, undergo third-party inspection by a certification body. As a 'passport' for ensuring free trade in the European Union, CE marking primarily addresses the requirements of the EU authorities, not those of consumers.

5. A safe and merry Christmas: "GS" stands for "Geprüfte Sicherheit" or "tested safety", which means products identified by this mark have been tested by an approved third-party certifier. This test mark also covers the inspection of the production facilities at least once a year. Here at TÜV SÜD Product Service only one in three products passes the type approval test straight away. Any products that fail will need to be re-worked before being re-tested or may never make it on the market. Some product certification organizations have further improved the GS mark, testing additional product

characteristics such as fitness for use or energy efficiency. TÜV SÜD Product Service confirms such characteristics by issuing the TÜV SÜD Octagon mark.

6. Christmas in the air? Follow your nose: avoid buying products with a strongly chemical or scented smell, which may be an indication of pollutants. Painted toys should always be sweat and saliva proof. Run a wetted finger over the present you have selected. If the paint comes off, it's best to put the product back on the shelf.

7. Festivities free from rough edges: especially where children's toys are concerned. Take the toy in your hand and test it for rough edges or sharp corners which may cause injuries.

8. The bigger the present the better! This primarily holds true for children up to the age of three, who tend to put toys in their mouths. To avoid the risk of suffocation, toddlers should not be allowed to get hold of anything the size of a one pound coin or smaller. Also watch out that toys cannot be taken apart. Take the age restrictions provided by manufacturers seriously!

9. Teddy bears under the shower! Clean washable presents before they are used, especially if this is recommended in the instructions for use. Allow rag dolls, Father Christmases and other soft toys to dry out thoroughly to prevent mould spores from forming. A 24-hour stay in the freezer takes care of dust mites.

10. Caution: technical jargon! Does the present come with instructions for use in plain and understandable language? If there are no instructions for use or if the translation sounds as if it was computer-generated you should sit up and take notice. Read the instructions for use thoroughly before using the present for the first time. Be sure to heed all warning notices issued by the manufacturer!



Warning over fake hair straighteners

Trading Standards officers have warned people about dangerous fake hair straighteners after a teenager was left with melted hair and a singed scalp. Rebecca Day, 17, from Braunstone Town, Leicester, chose the tongs, believing them to be GHD straighteners from a website, but was left in agony when she first used them. "These straighteners singed my hair and ripped it away from the roots," she said. "I was in agony."

Leicestershire Trading Standards, which has so far seized 40 sets of counterfeit straighteners, said some of them heat up to 285C (545F) - hot enough to melt human hair and seriously burn someone's scalp. The fakes are modelled on GHD straighteners, so it is important that popular products are purchased from GHD-approved retailers. Product testing experts, TÜV SÜD Product Service suggest that UK consumers do not pay enough attention to the products that they purchase, often choosing the cheapest product or reseller, in favour of a reputable brand or an authorised reseller. Consumers often assume that a product is genuine because it displays a CE marking or approval marks, not realising that the markings on the product are also fake.

"We regularly see counterfeit products coming into our laboratory. Although, from the outside they may look like the genuine product, it's what you can't see inside that is the scariest thing. These kinds of products pose a real safety risk, in this case exposing the user to damaging temperatures, and in other cases we see the risk of electric shock from poor wiring, insulation or design," said Mark Penton, Product Safety Expert, at TÜV SÜD Product Service.

Other problems with counterfeit products are the substances used in manufacture, which may contain ingredients harmful to humans. "The product manufacturers are required to meet REACH regulations which make sure that substances which are carcinogenic, mutagenic or toxic are not used in the supply chain. Unfortunately, counterfeit products sometimes use these chemicals and can pose a health risk," said Richard Poate, Compliance Services Manager at TÜV SÜD Product Service. "Some products do still find their way on to our shelves, so retailers and resellers should watch out for the weekly European RAPEX report containing items removed from sale in the EU for failing to meet regulations."

TÜV SÜD Product Service's advice to consumers is not to panic as the vast majority of products that they use are safe and do genuinely comply with safety standards. However, if they are really concerned about a product's safety, they should contact the customer service department of the retailer from which they purchased the item or alternatively contact their local Trading Standards officers. If consumers are in doubt about safety before purchasing a product, we always recommend that they spend the extra pound and buy a recognised brand from a reputable retailer.



Take your learning to a higher level



New Training courses

- CE marking workshop – Fareham – 19th January

For further information on this training course and to find out about future training courses, please visit our website www.tuvps.co.uk/training.

book now

Sandie Peacock
Tel: 01489 558227
Email: info@tuvps.co.uk
www.tuvps.co.uk/training

Complimentary REACH obligations Seminar

TÜV SÜD Product Service is hosting a complimentary seminar at the Macdonald Manchester Hotel on Wednesday 8th December 2010, covering a number of topics including the REACH obligations for retailers, manufacturers and importers.

The Registration, Authorisation, Evaluation and Restriction of Chemicals legislation (REACH) is an extremely important piece of European Law and compliance with it is paramount in ensuring that potentially dangerous chemicals do not find their way into everyday products. The rapid alert system for non-food products (RAPEX) lists many non-conforming items every week as a result of market surveillance actions conducted throughout Europe. Chemicals are found everywhere in items you import, items you manufacture and in the processes you use during manufacture. Most people think REACH applies only to chemical manufacturers, but this is not so, as there are implications of REACH right across the supply chain. This seminar will simply and easily explain how 1000 pages of complex legislation apply to you, your products, your suppliers and your customers. **Can you afford not to know how REACH affects you?**

The seminar will start at 10.00am and will end at 12.30pm. The presentations will be made by TÜV SÜD Product Service's experts Alastair McLaughlin on a Guide to the new toy directive (2009/48/EC) and Child appealing products, Richard Poate on the importance of Due Diligence for importers and Retailers and Phil Dolling on the REACH obligations.

If you or your colleagues would like to attend or have any questions regarding the seminar, please do not hesitate to contact Zoe Perkins at zperkins@tuvps.co.uk or by phone on 01489 558224

Lighting up the Christmas tree

- >>> Christmas tree lights may become a fire hazard
- >>> Overheating can result when multiple bulbs blow
- >>> Light sets with transformers offer higher safety
- >>> Caution: makeshift extensions may cause short circuit

Christmas is the time of festive decorations and lights – houses, fences, reindeer, angels, Santas, stars and of course Christmas trees are all aglow during the festive period. Fairy lights or strings of lights are an essential part of Christmas decorations. As a practical alternative to candles, they provide romantic lighting without the need for constant supervision. However, string lights are not all sweetness and light. The damage caused when Christmas trees and decorations catch fire adds up to roughly 10 million pounds every year. Major causes of these fires are not only candles, but also – and increasingly frequently – defective string lights, which may make trees or decoration go up in smoke if not handled correctly.

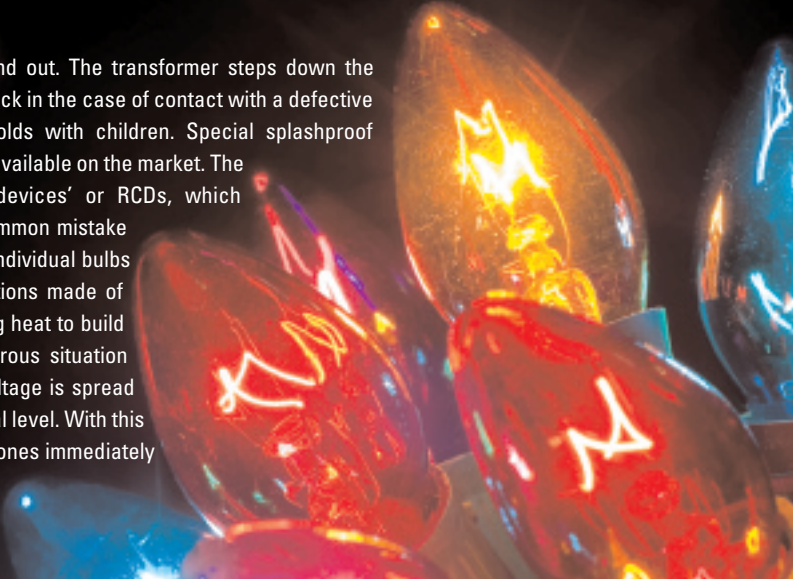
TÜV SÜD Product Service gives tips on how to avoid incorrect installation of string and rope lights:

Smouldering and short circuits

Purchasers of string lights should look out for products bearing the TÜV SÜD Octagon or TÜV SÜD GS mark, showing that these products have been thoroughly tested and meet the relevant safety requirements. String lights must satisfy the requirements of class II or III equipment (recognisable by their international symbols, i.e. a square inside a square or a Roman numeral III within a diamond). String lights without these symbols should not be sold on the market. Home owners planning to brighten up their façade or garden should only use string lights that are designed for outdoor use and are sufficiently weatherproof. The product pros advise do-it-yourselfers to fasten their light decorations with cable ties, which, unlike staplers, cannot damage electric wires. Christmas decoration fans should be particularly careful when using extension cords, which are not generally weatherproof. Power strips are also unsuitable for permanent outdoor use. "Slowly but surely, moisture inevitably penetrates and will cause a short circuit", explains Richard Poate, Compliance Service Manager at TÜV SÜD Product Service. Given this, power strips should only be used in dry places. In addition, string lights may only be extended if expressly permitted by the manufacturer. These sets of lights come with water-resistant connectors, and the maximum number of extension sets is given on the package and must be strictly observed, otherwise the wattage specified by the manufacturer may soon be exceeded. Given this, decoration-lovers should take measurements, decide on the length of string lights they require before they buy and, if necessary, go to a specialist shop.

Rapid overheating

String lights with transformers offer higher safety both indoors and out. The transformer steps down the voltage to a maximum of 50 volts, reducing the danger of electric shock in the case of contact with a defective live part. This may be a critical feature, particularly in households with children. Special splashproof transformers identifiable by protection class IP 44, IP 54 or IP 64 are available on the market. The experts also recommend the installation of 'residual current devices' or RCDs, which immediately interrupt the electricity supply if a defect occurs. A common mistake made by consumers is to underestimate the heat generated by the individual bulbs of a string of lights, and cover the lights with hand-made decorations made of paper or similar materials. Covering the bulbs causes the developing heat to build up, and may set the decoration alight. Another potentially dangerous situation arises if several bulbs blow at the same time. "In this case, the voltage is spread over the remaining bulbs and causes heat radiation to rise to a critical level. With this in mind, users should check bulbs frequently and replace defective ones immediately to keep fire hazards to a minimum", advises Richard Poate. If bulbs cannot be replaced, the best move is to pull the plug.



TÜV SÜD Product Service is now a SNAP lab!

TÜV SÜD Product Service's state of the art facility in Fareham has recently increased its accreditation scope as a Satellite Notification and Acceptance Programme (SNAP) site under the NRTL programme for North America.

National Recognised Testing Laboratories, or NRTLs, are third party organisations recognised by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) under Federal code 29 CFR 1910.7 to provide product safety testing and certification services for products used in the Workplace. Having this accreditation enables TÜV SÜD Product Service to carry out testing and certification of products for the US and Canadian markets. Richard Poate, Compliance Services Manager at TÜV SÜD Product Service, commented "being formally recognised as a SNAP site allows us to continue to provide a single test programme to our clients covering the world market. SNAP for North America, GS mark for Europe, CB Scheme Certification for most other countries around the world. We are truly approaching our goal of "one test for all markets"!

TÜV SÜD Product Service Ltd • TÜV SÜD Group

Tel: +44 (0)1489 558100 • Email: info@tuvps.co.uk • www.tuvps.co.uk • www.twitter.com/tuvps

