
*Preventing deaths and
injuries in the home
in Northern Ireland*



Who We Are

Electrical Safety First is a consumer charity dedicated to preventing deaths, injuries and damage caused by electricity.

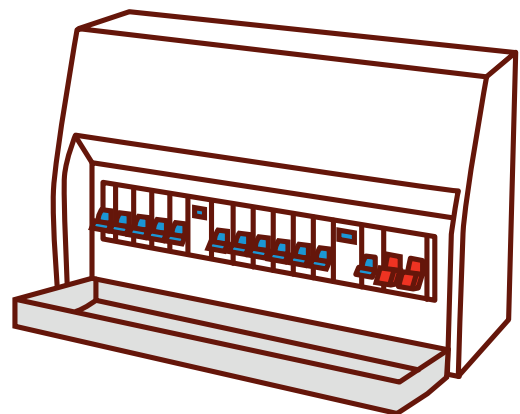
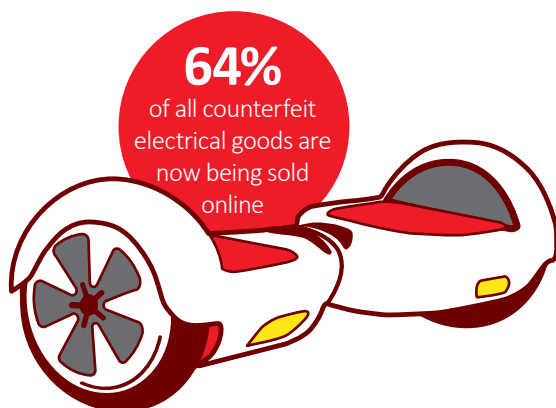
- We work with tenants, landlords, homeowners and governments to reduce deaths and accidents in the home.
- We campaign on behalf of consumers and electrical trade professionals to improve safety regulation and ensure safety messages are appropriate, up-to-date and well communicated.
- We provide expert information and advice to help people protect themselves from faulty, damaged, substandard and poorly maintained electrical installations and electrical appliances.
- We are recognised by government and industry as the leading campaigning charity and technical authority on electrical safety in the home.

Keeping People Safe

Electricity can and does kill. In Northern Ireland alone, every year, it causes nearly 600 house fires, 65 injuries and 3 deaths¹ – that's more than two thirds of all accidental house fires.

Electrical Safety First believes that no one, regardless of age, income or where they live in Northern Ireland, should be put at risk of electrical faults in their home.

To this end, we have been campaigning to improve electrical safety in a number of key areas.



Preventing Fires and Protecting Homes in Northern Ireland

The issue:

The Northern Ireland Executive is currently responsible for enforcing housing standards and protecting tenants. However, with devolution in crisis, a number of key issues surrounding electrical safety in the home remain unaddressed, particularly around the rapidly changing housing landscape.

The Private Rented Sector (PRS) in Northern Ireland is expanding at an unprecedented rate and now makes up approximately 20%² of all housing. Increasing numbers of families and vulnerable people are now renting privately. Recent research undertaken by Electrical Safety First in conjunction with NUS-USI also suggests that students are being left exposed to unnecessary and dangerous situations by negligent landlords and lettings agents³. Rapid growth brings its own problems, with safety a key concern and electrical safety a particular priority. Consumer and tenant safety must be a priority – both in Westminster and Stormont.

While the PRS continues to grow, owner-occupied homes still account for 62% of Northern Ireland's housing stock⁴. However, owner-occupiers are not required to undertake any preventative electrical safety regime - they can choose to determine acceptable risk levels in their home. This can lead to neighbouring properties being put at risk, particularly in tenements and flats, where fire can easily spread and impact on other residents.

Perhaps more surprising is the fact that there is currently no legal requirement to carry out electrical safety checks in social rented housing in Northern Ireland. This patchwork of regulation puts both person and property at needless risk.



We want to see:

- **Better co-operation between Northern Irish MPs and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on reserved and expected housing issues, and particularly in the event of Direct Rule.**
- **A strong commitment to improving electrical safety in the home, both from Westminster and Stormont.**
- **Five-yearly electrical safety checks in the PRS and a visual inspection when a tenancy changes hands. To ensure fairness for all renters, this fundamental safety requirement should be extended to all social rented housing.**
- **Consideration should also be given to mandatory checks in owner-occupied properties – or, as a first step, in owner-occupied flats.**
- **Evictions following complaints about electrical faults or appliances outlawed.**
- **Residual Current Devices (RCDs) fitted in all rented homes.**
- **A national framework for public agencies working with vulnerable clients, so that referrals regarding electrical safety concerns in the home can be dealt with effectively.**
- **Wider awareness of the dangers of undertaking electrical work in the home and the need to always consult a registered electrician.**

Northern Ireland's Exit from the European Union

The Issue:

Much of the current legislation in Northern Ireland with relation to product safety and consumer protection is dependent upon minimum standards set out in EU legislation. As an expected matter, the UK also currently works closely with the other twenty-seven member states of the EU to monitor products that are placed on the market to ensure that they meet the necessary minimum safety requirements so as not to pose a danger to consumers.

The UK also works with trading standards authorities and customs officials across the EU to ensure that unsafe and counterfeit products are stopped at the point of entry.



We want to see:

- **No deregulation of product safety standards implemented by EU laws once Northern Ireland has left the European Union.**
- **That the protections afforded to consumers through our membership of the EU are maintained and strengthened upon our exit.**
- **Continued close working with European partners to ensure that products entering the Northern Ireland market are safe and meet the minimum standards set and that dangerous products are intercepted and reported.**



Product Safety and Counterfeit Goods

The issue:

Product Safety

The product recall system for faulty electrical goods is failing consumers. Faulty recalled appliances are responsible for significant numbers of domestic fires and a number of tragic fatalities. The success rate for electrical recall notices is rarely more than 10-20 per cent.

There is currently a serious gap between faults that manufacturers and suppliers of electrical goods know about, and what consumers are aware of. The UK's complex and self-regulated product recall system has left many unsafe products in people's homes, threatening lives and property. Manufacturers are not currently incentivised to take swift, appropriate action to counter potential danger.

Counterfeits

Adding to this problem is the huge increase in the number of counterfeit and sub-standard electrical goods entering the country. Fakes follow the trends in must-have items; they will often be priced fractionally lower than the genuine product so as not to arouse suspicion. Seizures of fake mobile phones have risen by more than fifty per cent, along with other common electrical fakes including mobile phone chargers and health and beauty products such as hair straighteners.

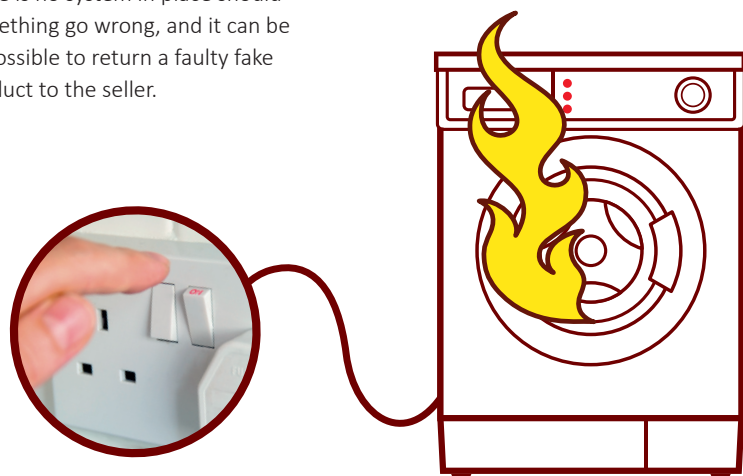
Consumers in Northern Ireland are more likely to buy counterfeit goods than any other region, according to a recent report by PwC⁵. More than half of those surveyed said they bought fake items - the highest percentage in the UK.

Our research has shown that 64 per cent of all counterfeit electrical goods are now being sold online with sales via social media growing by 15 per cent.⁶ Over the last three years, social media has become the place to advertise and trade in counterfeit goods, with thousands of items being made available on a daily basis. Many items are also sold through trusted online marketplaces leading consumers to believe they are genuine. Seeing such open trading may lead people to think that the products must be safe to buy, but these apparent bargains are usually too good to be true.

Fake goods often contain faulty parts or do not contain the vital safety components that prevent them from overheating and catching fire. If people buy a counterfeit product there is no system in place should something go wrong, and it can be impossible to return a faulty fake product to the seller.

We want to see:

- **Better traceability of electrical products from point-of-sale to consumer.**
- **Government collect, review and publish product recall information, so that consumers have a trusted authority to consult.**
- **Better co-ordination and funding of Trading Standards between Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales to combat increasing numbers of counterfeit electrical goods being imported.**
- **Enforcement agencies prioritise action on fake electrical goods and new enforcement operations set up to target the sale of counterfeit electrical items.**





- 1 Statistical data obtained from Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. The data referred to relates to the year 2014-15.
- 2 NISRA. 2011 Census: <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/census/2011Census.html>
- 3 Survey carried out during November 2015 by Electrical Safety First and NUS USI with a sample of 100 students between the ages of 18 to 49
- 4 Northern Ireland House Condition Survey 2011
- 5 Northern Ireland Executive Family Resources Survey 2012/13
- 6 www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/news-and-campaigns/press-releases/2016/06/british-consumers-now-twice-as-likely-to-buy-a-counterfeit-electrical-product/

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Electrical Safety First is the UK charity dedicated to reducing deaths and injuries caused by electrical accidents. Our aim is to ensure everyone in the UK can use electricity safely

**Electrical
Safety First** 
The UK's electrical safety experts