

Introduction

Electrical Safety First welcomes the introduction of the Consumer Scotland Bill which aims to strengthen the rights of consumers through the creation of a new public body – Consumer Scotland.

Electrical Safety First – the consumer safety charity which aims to reduce the number of deaths and injuries caused by electricity – offered several proposals in relation to the Bill. **These included our call for Consumer Scotland to have a duty to disseminate advice and information about major product recalls.**

This is an issue which needs serious action, given that the average success rate of product recalls is just around 10%-20%. **Having a central body – a single, trusted source – coordinating recall information and advice is key to reaching consumers with a consistent and effective message.**

We therefore welcome the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee's support for our proposals in its Stage 1 report and in this briefing highlight where the Bill could be strengthened to provide necessary safety protections for Scottish consumers.

Key Recommendations

- **We believe the Bill must include a duty on Consumer Scotland to disseminate information and advice about major product recalls.** While consumer protection powers are reserved to the UK Government, this Bill offers an opportunity to provide safeguards for Scottish consumers around defective electrical products. Last year, products accounted for 80% of all house fires in Scotland.¹ And two major ongoing recalls by Whirlpool further shows that any possible action must be taken.
- **We believe the Bill could be strengthened to ensure consumer voices are a central part of setting Consumer Scotland's work programme with a requirement for it to consult.** This would provide an opportunity for organisations, who campaign and advocate on behalf of consumers, to propose issues for further investigation.
- We support the information-gathering powers of Consumer Scotland which will allow the body to request information from any person or business supplying goods or services to consumers. **We would like to see Consumer Scotland use these powers to acquire information on behalf of other relevant organisations, such as charities, with limited resource capabilities.** This would be particularly useful in obtaining information from companies that are not subject to the FOI Act, such as product manufacturers.

Product Recalls and Priority Electrical Safety Issues

- Recent high profile recalls by Whirlpool perfectly illustrate the failings of the current UK product recall system. The company currently has two major recalls underway, involving over a million tumble-dryers and washing machines due to potential safety concerns. **Electrical Safety First's research has found that only a third of Scottish consumers currently register their appliances, making it difficult for manufacturers to contact them about recalls.**
- As Consumer Scotland will be an investigatory body, as much as an advocacy one, **we would like to see it prioritise investigations into key product safety issues – particularly white**

¹ Electrical Safety First analysis of data received from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in 2019.

goods such as washing machines and tumble-dryers and electrical counterfeits sold via online marketplaces.

- **In Scotland alone, in just one year, there were over four fires a week caused by white goods.**² While many of Scotland's issues are shared with the rest of the UK, there are also country-specific issues to consider. Rural poverty, in particular, can result in people looking for the cheapest rather than the safest option. This is not limited to saving on 'big ticket' items but also life 'necessities' such as phone chargers. Our research with Apple showed a significant issue with the safety of counterfeit and lookalike UK iPhone chargers, with 49 out of 50 tested having the potential to deliver a lethal electric shock and/or cause of fire.
- Scotland has a higher number of people living in rural areas, which we believe results in more people in Scotland shopping online – and unintentionally buying substandard and counterfeit electrical goods. **We found that one in five Scots (1 million people) have purchased a fake electrical product that was advertised as genuine.**³ The particular concern around counterfeit electrical items arises from the fact that they can often be sub-standard and – unlike a fake designer dress or handbag – can cause fires, maim and kill.

Conclusion

Currently, the consumer landscape in Scotland is fragmented, complex and confusing to navigate, so we broadly welcome the Consumer Scotland Bill and the development of a central consumer body. We also support the primary aim for Consumer Scotland to have an investigative function and hope it will prioritise key electrical safety issues, some of which we have outlined above.

We believe our proposals for the Bill would strengthen safety protections for consumers, particularly around products, and we look forward to working with Members of the Scottish Parliament on these important issues.

For further information about this briefing, please contact Wayne Mackay, Deputy Public Affairs Manager at Electrical Safety First: wayne.mackay@electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk or 07973709358.

² Data provided by Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in August 2019

³ Survey undertaken from 18 to 21 May 2018 by Censuswide with a sample of 2,000 general consumers. The figures are representative of all Scottish adults.