



Online & Home Electrical Safety

Caroline Dinenage MP
Minister of State for Digital and Culture
Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport
100 Parliament Street
London SW1A 2BQ

23rd February 2021

Dear Minister,

Regulating the sale of unsafe electrical goods on online marketplaces

The APPG Online & Home Electrical Safety met on 21st January, and we agreed to write to you regarding the forthcoming Online Safety Bill and the Government's final response to the consultation on Online Harms published in December 2020.

We note that, in its response to the consultation, the Government detailed that the Online Safety Bill would deem online content harmful *'where it gives rise to a reasonably foreseeable risk of a significant adverse physical or psychological impact on individuals.'*

On this basis, it is appropriate that the advertisement and sale of unsafe electrical goods online be included within the scope of this legislation. These goods can cause physical and psychological harm, and the risk they pose is reasonably foreseeable.

The death of Linda Merron in 2015, caused by an electrical product bought on an online marketplace, is one example. A house fire in East London in 2020, caused by an electrical product bought on an online marketplace, is another. These examples demonstrate the physical harm that unsafe electrical goods can cause – and in both cases, better regulation could have prevented these incidents. These physical harms were reasonably foreseeable.

The regulation of online marketplaces is now more important than ever. The Covid-19 pandemic has altered consumer's shopping behaviours, increasing dependence on online marketplaces. Against this backdrop, it is important that consumers are safe when shopping online. Indeed, whilst consumers are protected by consumer right's legislation when buying electrical goods on the high street, they do not enjoy the same protections when buying online from a marketplace.

In this vein, we note your concern that including the sale of unsafe goods within the scope of the Online Safety Bill will create regulatory duplication. Given that consumers do not enjoy regulatory protection when shopping on online marketplaces, this is not the case. Instead, including the sale of unsafe goods within the Online Safety Bill removes the gaps in the existing legislative framework.

Furthermore, the introduction of social media marketplaces, such as Instagram and Facebook Marketplaces, highlight that this issue will continue to grow, as more consumers are encouraged to shop online. On this basis, it is vital that there is a regulatory framework in place to protect consumers who are

unaware of the risks they are exposing themselves to. This is particularly important as the Online Safety Bill is intended to proactively address evolving and emerging harms.

We note that, as detailed in the final response to the consultation, the Government intends to regulate the sale of illegal drugs and weapons on online platforms. As such, the Bill will seek to regulate the sale of certain physical products and considers this regulation to be practicably possible.

Unsafe electrical goods can cause comparable physical and psychological harm to an individual. And the risks they pose are reasonably foreseen.

Current legislation is failing UK consumers by allowing the advertising and subsequent sale of unsafe goods on online marketplaces. This is especially the case given that social media platforms are now facilitating sales. Our research shows that UK consumers are purchasing unsafe products online and this clearly demonstrates that the current legislation is not working. **We therefore urge the Government to include the sale of unsafe electrical goods online within scope of this legislation.**

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely,

Carolyn Harris MP, Chair of the APPG Online & Home Electrical Safety

Yvonne Fovargue MP, Chair of the APPG Consumer Protection

Darren Jones MP

Derek Thomas MP

Andrew Rosindell MP

Gerald Jones MP

Bob Blackman MP

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP

Andrew Slaughter MP

Jim Shannon MP

Alison Thewliss MP

Kenny MacAskill MP

Richard Thomson MP

Philippa Whitford MP

Deidre Brock MP

Liz Saville Roberts MP

Steven Bonnar MP

Margaret Ferrier MP

Martin Docherty-Hughes MP
Allan Dorans MP
Paula Barker MP
Neil Gray MP
Kirsten Oswald MP
Ben Lake MP
Hywel Williams MP
Jonathan Edwards MP
Patricia Gibson MP
Mick Whitley MP
Chris Law MP
Carol Monaghan MP
Daisy Cooper MP
Alan Brown MP
Mary Kelly Foy MP
Kim Johnson MP
Kate Osborne MP
Sarah Olney MP
Neil Coyle MP
Lord Tope
Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth
Baroness Altmann
Lord Clement-Jones
Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury
Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville
Lord Shipley
Lord Whitty