

EU Member States Take Action against Dangerous Cords and Drawstrings on Children's Clothing

Long cords and drawstrings can pose a high risk of strangulation to children. EU Market surveillance authorities have serious concerns about the exposure of children to these risks and have decided to raise awareness of this problem. It is important, in order to protect children from injuries, for stakeholders, particularly parents and guardians to be alert to the potential dangers.

European Market surveillance authorities continue to receive notifications of accidents where cords or drawstrings on children's garments had become entangled in, bicycles, doors, car doors or playground apparatus. These types of incidents can lead to severe injury and in the most tragic cases, to the death of the child. Member States have prioritized the market surveillance of these products to ensure that cords or drawstrings on outer garments for children under 14 years, meet the necessary safety requirements.

In 2008, PROSAFE- The Product Safety Enforcement Forum of Europe- initiated a joint market surveillance action on "Cords and Drawstrings on Children's Clothing". Representatives from ten EU Member States and other relevant stakeholders are participating in this joint action. The primary objective of the Joint Action is to ensure that children's clothing is safe.

The Joint Action Group is calling on parents, guardians and relatives to take precautions and ensure that their children's outer garments do not have trailing strings or draw-cords. The Joint Action Group has drawn up a number of recommendations in relation to the safety of children's clothing. These include the following:

7 Recommendations of Market Surveillance Authorities

- 1) Clothes for children up to 7 years (height 1.34 m) shall not have cords or drawstrings in the hood and neck area.
- 2) Clothes for children between 7 and 14 years shall not have cords in the hood and neck area longer than 75 mm or drawstrings with free ends. Cords in the hood and neck area should not be elastic except for shoulder straps and halter necks
- 3) Halter neck- style children's clothes shall not have loose ends in the hood and neck area.
- 4) Children's clothes intended to be tied at the front of the garment shall not have tied belts or sashes longer than 360mm in length, measured when untied and from the point where they are to be tied.
- 5) Other cords or drawstrings on children's clothing should not trail below the sleeve or hems of garments
- 6) Don't manually produce children's clothes that do not meet the requirements enumerated above.
- 7) If you already possess children's clothes that fail to meet the requirements in points 1 to 5 you should remove or cut off the cord or drawstring. You can also exchange the article at the store where you bought it and advice the seller of the risks deriving from the article.

Definitions:

Cord: A string that is fixed to the garment and serves decorative purposes or is used to adjust the size of an opening or to fasten the garment.

Drawstring: A string that passes through a channel or loops to adjust the size of an opening or to fasten the garment.

Background

According to the European Community's General Product Safety Directive (GPSD) products, including clothes that are placed on the EC market MUST be safe. Producers, importers and retailers have an obligation to ensure this. The GPSD notably provides for special protection and attention to groups of consumers that are particularly vulnerable such as children.

The new standard on draw-cords, EN 14682: 2007, developed by the European Committee for standardization CEN, is based on the provisions of the GPSD. If the business complies with this new standard it is assumed that children's clothes are safe. The PROSAFE Cords and Drawstrings Joint Action relies on the assumptions of both the GPSD and the standard for cords and drawstrings. PROSAFE is a non- profit organization, financially supported by the European Commission with the scope of enhancing market surveillance through best practice.

Recommendations

Even though the joint action is still not concluded the notified accidents have given clear proof to the fact that clothing for small and newborn children with attached drawstring or cords poses a high risk to the young and unaware group of end users. For this reason the message to both parents is: "Try to renounce those potentially dangerous fashion accessories".

The message to business stakeholders dealing with children's textiles is: "You are responsible for the safety of the products you bring on the market. Be aware of the legislation and the standard".
