

March 11th 2009

1st anniversary for the ban of non child-resistant lighters and novelty lighters

Market surveillance authorities in the European Member States are busy increasing the safety of the consumer. Preliminary results show that more than 600 lighter models have been removed from the European market celebrating a 1st year anniversary of the ban against child-resistant lighters and novelty lighters.

Lighters that are not used with care can quickly turn into dangerous products. This has proven to be the case particularly when children accidentally come into contact with lighters without the guidance of parental supervision. Children's play with dangerous lighters is known to have caused several house fires and inflicted terrible as well as fatal injuries on the consumer for many years.

A European Commission decision which took effect from 11 March 2007 banned non-child-resistant lighters or lighters that in any shape or form resembled objects that are commonly recognised as appealing to children, from being placed on the market. The consequence of the decision is that it has been illegal to offer such lighters to consumers after 11 March 2008.

Thus the 11th of March 2009 marks the one-year anniversary of this ban. During this year, the European Member States have been very active (as well as in the preceding months) enforcing the decision and checking lighters. Thirteen Member States have joined forces in a joint market surveillance action, financially supported by the European Commission. The preliminary reports of the results from these Member States give a good indication of the high level of activity:

- More than 1,800 inspections have been carried out. This includes customs checks of more than 450 consignments and more than 1,000 inspections at retailers.
- The participants have checked more than 1,800 lighter models.
- Measures have seen the withdrawal of approximately 600 lighter models because they were found to be dangerous or because the economic operator did not possess the required technical documentation. Those of the 600 lighters that present the most serious risk to the consumer can be found in the RAPEX reports on the European Commission's website.

The Member States will continue their activities throughout 2009. The joint action formally ends in December this year, but the participants have started their discussion on how to continue their

activities as the interim results clearly indicate that it will take further efforts to ensure that lighters on the European market comply with the legal requirements.

Advice to consumers

As a consumer you are advised to follow the 8 rules for the safe use of lighters listed below:

8 Rules for Safe Operation of Lighters

1. Do not buy lighters which do not come with any evidence of child safety or are designed in a way that may be appealing to children.
2. Do not leave lighters within the easy reach of children. Child-resistant does not mean child-proof.
3. Do not leave lighters on hot surfaces or exposed to prolonged sunshine (e.g. on the dashboard in a car). Heat might modify the lighters' properties and cause fires.
4. Only use lighters for their intended purpose. Misuse may be dangerous.
5. Dispose of defective lighters as soon as you discover any disruption or leakage.
6. Do not attempt to repair a lighter yourself. Always use the appointed service centre.
7. Only use the appropriate fuel when refilling your lighter. Guidance is found in the instructions for use.
8. Never attempt to refill lighters that are not refillable.

Look after the environment. Dispose of empty lighters responsibly.

Background

The joint action is coordinated by PROSAFE, "The Product Safety Enforcement Forum of Europe". It is a non-profit organisation bringing together market surveillance officers from all across Europe and overseas.

According to the General Product Safety Directive any product that is placed on the European market must be safe. This is an obligation of producers, importers and distributors. Lighters are presumed to be safe if they are constructed and produced in a way that they meet the requirements of two standards:

- EN ISO 9994 that lays down safety requirements for properties like flame height, resistance to high temperatures, extinction time, maximum filling, etc.
- EN 13869 that lays down requirements for the child-resistance and defines the term novelty lighter. (Novelty lighters are lighters that by any means resembles to objects generally recognised to appeal to children.)