

ECIPE PRESS RELEASE — NEW POLICY BRIEF

Combating Unsafe Products: How to Improve Europe's Safety Gate Alerts

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Brussels, Belgium, 22nd April 2021 - Europe's dangerous product notifications lack specific information required to allow speedy removals and recalls, an ECIPE study published today reports. The study looked at over 900 notifications published on Europe's Safety Gate portal during 2020.

Notifications were graded against eight essential criteria, each allocated different points, with "perfect" notifications achieving a score of 100. Criteria included, for example, product name, brand name, model number, serial number, whether an image was included or whether recommended action was specified.

Although the average notification score was a respectable 70 out of 100, over 98 percent of the notifications omitted at least one key criterion, and only 14 included all the information to enable efficient and accurate product identification.

Officially called the Rapid Alert System for Dangerous Non-Food Products, Safety Gate is designed to enable the quick exchange of information between 31 European countries and the European Commission about dangerous non-food products posing a risk to consumer health and safety. Safety Gate has improved both in the quantity and quality of its notifications over its two decades in operation. Guidelines published in 2019 represent a significant step forward in harmonising notifications.

But, as Covid-19 has highlighted, additional improvements are required. Many notifications of dangerous masks or sanitizers designed to protect against the virus lacked sufficient details for quick removal. While some notifications of unsafe masks have barcodes, many contained no product name, no brand name, and no model name. These details are important to consumers whether they buy offline or online.

The new ECIPE study aims to provide suggestions to fill in the remaining gaps in notifications.

These include:

- Providing additional information needed for detection and removal from sale, such as brand names, model numbers, size, weight, bar code, and product names
- Adding company contact details to notifications, easing efforts to remove dangerous products from sale

- Ensuring a standardised format for alerts to achieve more consistent quality; at present, the same authority may publish both well-designed alerts and deficient alerts

Product safety enforcement represents a European policy priority. The European Commission is conducting a review of the General Product Safety Directive which “is almost 20 years old and as such does not reflect recent developments in products and markets,” the Commission notes in its recent paper outlining policy options. The report recommends increasing the ability of the European Commission to set and enforce clear guidelines for product safety alerts.

Amazon and Rakuten provided financial support to the authors for this report. One of the authors, William Echikson, consults for Rakuten and helps represent the company in the European Commission’s Product Safety Pledge.

“The study aims to enable efficient product recall processes, which are in line with the Commission’s stated priorities for the General Product Safety Directive,” says William Echikson, the report’s lead researcher. “A strong, unified, and complete format for notifications of dangerous products represents a basic building block for ensuring safety.”

Publication details:

Combating Unsafe Products: How to Improve Europe’s Safety Gate Alerts, ECIPE Policy Brief No. 6/2021

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