

Serious concerns raised by the ladder association

2 years ago



Latest research commissioned by the [Ladder Association](#) has raised serious concerns that unsafe and potentially dangerous ladders continue to be sold via online platforms to unsuspecting consumers in the UK.

The market surveillance study, part of the association's ongoing 'Step Up to Safe Ladders' campaign, found that 70% of the commercially-available multipurpose ladders they tested failed to meet the minimum safety requirements designed to keep users safe. Those products that failed include the top three products listed on each of the world's best-known online retailers, Amazon and eBay. Worryingly, all samples tested that were purchased online from Amazon and eBay as part of this study, failed the safety tests, were non-compliant and were unsafe to use.

Worse still, the research found that all of the failed ladders were advertised as 'compliant' with the product standard (EN 131-4), either on the product listing, product packaging or product labelling, in a deliberate attempt to mislead consumers. Further evidence was found that identical substandard products are being sold with different product names, seller names and branding, giving a false impression of greater product variety for consumers.

Online marketplaces have surged in popularity in recent years and are used by 9 in 10 adults who use the internet¹. As it stands, online marketplaces selling products supplied by third-party sellers, have no responsibility for preventing unsafe goods being sold on their platforms, and no legal obligation to inform consumers if they have purchased unsafe goods.

With online platforms, sellers are based worldwide. While Trading Standards can investigate and take

appropriate enforcement action against UK-based businesses, those operating outside the UK do not exist in current product safety law. The sellers are virtually anonymous, making it almost impossible to hold them to account. The current legal framework gives rogue manufacturers, suppliers and sellers based anywhere in the world, free rein to sell unsafe, and in worst cases deadly, products direct to unsuspecting consumers in the UK without threat of repercussion.

Executive director Peter Bennett said: “Making sure consumers are safe is our number one priority and we are committed to raising awareness of potentially harmful ladders. Working at height can be risky enough, without the additional danger of shoddy ladders – every 11 minutes in the UK, someone attends A&E after sustaining an injury involving a ladder². A fall from height can cause life changing injury, and in some cases, can even be fatal.

“We are aware of below-standard ladders being sold to unsuspecting consumers, particularly via online platforms, who pass the sole responsibility for product safety to the seller. But, if the seller does not care and has no threat of legal consequence due to being virtually anonymous and based overseas, our current legal framework is allowing people’s lives to be put at risk. This must stop.

“We must stress there *are* good quality and safe ladders available online and in physical stores – not all multipurpose ladders are unsafe. However, with increasing price pressure and the ‘Amazon effect’ on consumers and businesses, which puts price and convenience above safety, the market is far from a level playing field.

“The Ladder Association is again calling for urgent action from the UK Government to make regulatory changes to hold online platforms accountable for ensuring the products they sell are compliant and safe to use. We’re also urging people to take extra care when buying ladders online – do your research; read the reviews and when you get it, check the ladder itself, along with all instruction manuals and labels. And if you think the ladder is unsafe or dangerous don’t use it,” said Mr Bennett.

To find out more information on the ‘Step Up to Safe Ladders’ campaign and to view the full report, please follow the link: www.ladderassociation.org.uk/step-up

¹ National Audit Office – Protecting consumers from unsafe products

<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Protecting-consumers-from-unsafe-products.pdf>

² APPG on Working at Height Report ‘Staying Alive: Preventing Serious Injury and Fatalities while Working at Height’:

<https://workingatheight.info/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Staying-alive.pdf>