businesscompanion
trading standards law explained

Second-hand electrical goods

In the guide

Your responsibilities
Be sure electrical equipment is safe
Wiring colour codes
Plugs and sockets
Safe fireguards for electric fires
Electric blankets
Trading Standards
In this update
Key legislation

In this guide, the words 'must' or 'must not' are used where there is a legal requirement to do (or not do) something. The word 'should' is used where there is established legal guidance or best practice that is likely to help you avoid breaking the law.

This guidance is for England, Scotland and Wales

Sellers of second-hand electrical goods are responsible for ensuring the goods meet legal safety requirements, and sellers may be liable to pay compensation if they sell unsafe goods, which then cause injury or damage. If the equipment you are selling complies with an acceptable Standard, it will normally meet safety requirements.

Distributors and retailers, including second-hand dealers and auctions, must only sell appliances that are correctly fitted with an approved plug, with sleeved neutral and live pins, and the correct fuse. Electric fires for use in the home must have a fireguard that meets British Standards, or the European equivalent.

Your responsibilities

If you are in the business of selling any second-hand electrical goods, you should be aware of the following:

- the goods must meet legal safety requirements
- if you sell unsafe goods, and the goods cause injury or damage, you may have to pay compensation

The legal safety requirements are set out in the General Product Safety Regulations 2005 (GPSR), which provides for the legal duties of producers and distributors. It should be noted that if you do anything that affects the safety of the product (for example, repairing or servicing it, or even adding product instructions) you will be considered to be a 'producer'. For more information on producers' responsibilities under the GPSR, see 'General product safety: producers'.

If you are unsure whether the goods are safe, it is recommended that a competent person examines them for access to live parts, the adequacy of the insulation, and creepage and clearance distances. The items tested should be clearly identified in a report describing the tests carried out and the results. The tester should also label each item to show that it has passed, and include the date and their initials. All failed equipment should be destroyed or officially recycled if it cannot be safely repaired.

You should also check whether the electrical appliances are subject to a recall. The GOV.UK website contains information on recalled and withdrawn products, including electrical products. Product recalls and safety notices for electrical products, in particular, can be found on the Electrical Safety First website.

It is good practice to advise all staff that no electrical goods are to be sold unless they have a CE / UKCA mark and a dated PAT test label is attached (see 'CE / UKCA marking' for information about the marks). However a PAT test will not always find all the hazards inherent in a product; undertaking a physical examination of an appliance may reveal exposed or twisted wiring, for example, indicating a potential safety risk and that the appliance must not be sold. Keep all test reports for your own reference and for the purpose of showing to enforcement officers if requested.

Be sure electrical equipment is safe

The equipment you sell must be safe. If it complies with an acceptable Standard (for example, a British / European Standard) it will normally meet safety requirements.

These safety requirements cover:

- labelling, construction, design and manufacture
- insulation and earthing
- protection from electric shock
- adequate guards for radiant heaters or moving parts
- preventing the generation of excessive heat, radiation or toxic gases
- the need to provide instructions for safe use

Wiring colour codes

The wires of a three-core mains flexible lead must be coloured as follows:

- earth - green and yellow
- neutral - blue
- live - brown

Make sure that the lead is safe and there is no fraying, nor any breaks, kinks or exposed wires. If you change a lead, have it checked by an electrician. Incorrect wiring may cause electrocution.

Plugs and sockets

Distributors and retailers, including second-hand dealers and auctions, must only sell appliances that are correctly fitted with an approved plug, which has sleeved neutral and live pins, and the correct fuse. An approved plug is one that complies with BS 1363 (this is a series of Standards, covering various aspects of plug and socket safety). A plug checker to assist with your checks can be found on the Electrical Safety First website.

All plugs must carry the name and reference number of the approval body, normally BSI or ASTA (ASTA Diamond Mark, run by Intertek). The plug does not have to be moulded on, but it must be fused with the appropriate fuse link.

Some appliances, such as electric cookers, may be supplied without a standard plug because the appliance is intended to be permanently connected to fixed wiring.

If you fit a new plug (because the old one shows signs of damage, for example), it must be securely clamped by a cord grip on to the outer insulating flex to prevent excess strain at the wire terminations. The inner cores of flex in the plug must be of the correct length to prevent arcing and be securely fastened at the appropriate terminations.

You must provide clear wiring instructions for the plug if it is of the rewirable kind, even if you have fitted it yourself (for example, manufacturer's wiring card fitted over the pins).

All sockets (for example, on mains extension flexible leads), adaptors and similar devices must meet British Standards.

Safe fireguards for electric fires

Electric fires for use in the home must have a fireguard that meets BS 8423:2010+A2:2022 *Fireguards for fires and heating appliances for domestic use. Specification*. The distance between the bars and the strength of the guard are laid down in this Standard

The fireguard is satisfactory if any vertical bars are 5 mm or less apart. If they are not, the guard must satisfy one of the following:

- if the horizontal bars are 12 mm or less apart, the vertical bars must not be more than 126 mm apart
- if the horizontal bars are 20 mm or less apart, the vertical bars must not be more than 53 mm apart

Electric blankets

We advise you not to sell second-hand electric blankets, as their history, usage and condition may be unknown.

Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards services - and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law - please see 'Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

In this update

No major changes.

Last reviewed / updated: December 2025

Key legislation

- General Product Safety Regulations 2005
- Plugs and Sockets etc (Safety) Regulations 1994

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links go to the legislation.gov.uk website. The site usually updates the legislation to include any amendments made to it. However, this is not always the case. Information on all changes made to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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